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### The Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut: A Contextualized Study of Looted Fragments

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Honors Paper, 2015  
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*The Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut:*  
*A Contextualized Study of*  
*Looted Fragments*



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### Bibliographical Abbreviations

BMFA = Boston Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin

BSEG = Bulletin de la Société d'Égyptologie Genève

GM = Göttinger Miszellen

IBAES = Internet-Beitraege zur Aegyptologie und Sudanarchaeologie

JEA = Journal of Egyptian Archaeology

JARCE = Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt

JSAS = Journal of the Serbian Archaeological Society

LA = Lexikon der Ägyptologie

SAK = Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The looting of Egyptian tombs over time, especially with the rise of Egyptomania in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the competitive obsession of foreign countries to obtain Egyptian artifacts, has often hampered scholarly efforts to study Egyptian tombs and their contents in their original context. As a methodological attempt to counter this unfortunate situation, this paper proposes a “reconstruction” of one such looted tomb - that of Ny-anekh-nesut, an Old Kingdom noble - in the Saqqara necropolis. Through a re-contextualization of a number of this tomb’s relief fragments, now scattered in museums all over the world (including Oberlin College’s Allen Memorial Art Museum), along with an examination of the iconographic program of the tomb using the concept of agency, the original appearance and intent of the tomb can be hypothesized, as well as the societal and religious aspirations of its owner. In doing so, this paper will demonstrate that when looted fragments can be viewed together as part of the same tomb, important information can be gained about the original cultural context of the tomb. This type of study can be usefully employed to re-contextualize other isolated fragments dispersed in many of the Egyptian collections throughout the world.

Beginning in the Old Kingdom and continuing into later Egyptian history, the tomb was an integral part of one’s journey to the afterlife. A large percentage of the archaeological record in Egypt is made up of these monuments. Much of what is now known of Old Kingdom culture has been derived from the study of tombs, due to the fact that only a limited amount of other archaeological data survives.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of tombs, scattered throughout Egypt in locations such as Giza, Saqqara, and Abydos, have provided the basis for much scholarly work on not only the religious and funerary practices of the Ancient Egyptians, but also on their daily life, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Vischak, “Agency in Old Kingdom elite tomb programs: traditions, locations, and variable meanings,” *IBAES* 6 (2006): 257.

during the early period of the Old Kingdom, when other forms of archaeological evidence are scant.<sup>2</sup> Inscriptions detailing the deceased's roles and professions in life have been used to recreate the organization of the central governing body and religious cults of Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Scenes of harvesting within tombs have helped provide insight into Egyptian agriculture whereas scenes of fishing and fowling have assisted in recreating recreational activities that the ancient Egyptians may have enjoyed.<sup>4</sup> Changes in the decoration placed within tombs have been used as data to support theories regarding a change in religious practices and beliefs during the Old Kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

But what happens to the information contained within tombs when the decorative programs are looted, broken apart, and distributed to museums and collections around the globe? Can something still be gleaned in viewing fragments of tomb decoration outside of their original context?

The looting of tombs has been a problem that has plagued Egypt dating back to the time of the Pharaohs. The Egyptians knew that their monuments would be visible to anyone living or passing through the area of their construction. The tombs were made out of valuable stone and would have contained artifacts that might attract thieves. The Great Pyramid at Giza was built with an elaborate scheme to protect the burial chamber from looting, showing how grave a

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<sup>2</sup> For tombs serving as evidence for the daily life of Egyptians, see Salim Ikram, *Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt* (London: Longman, 2003) and Stuart Tyson Smith, "Ethnicity and Culture" in *The Egyptian World*, ed. Toby Wilkinson (New York: Routledge, 2010): 218-241. For a specific case study of daily life scenes serving as useful evidence for life in Ancient Egypt, see Emily Teeter, "Techniques and Terminology of Rope-making in Ancient Egypt," *JEA* 73 (1987): 71-77.

<sup>3</sup> For a description of elite titles and their relationship to the organization of Egypt, see Klaus Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) and Nigel Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom* (Boston: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Chapter Five of this paper discusses possible interpretations of such "daily life" scenes.

<sup>5</sup> Leo Roeten, *The Decoration on the Cult Chapel Walls of the Old Kingdom Tombs at Giza* (Boston: Brill, 2014).

problem looting was at the time. By the New Kingdom, all of the pyramids from the Old Kingdom had been looted despite the measures taken against such acts.<sup>6</sup> Not only the royal tombs but also the tombs of elites were frequently looted, with most of the evidence for such cases coming from the well-documented period of the New Kingdom. During this time, numerous confessions of robberies and the court cases surrounding the trials of thieves have been found on papyri.<sup>7</sup> Even in the Old Kingdom, there is evidence of looting in the form of curses that individuals placed within their tombs in order to ward off visitors with ill intent.<sup>8</sup>

Much of the later issue of looting in Egypt stems from the fascination that other societies have had in the land of the Pharaohs. Due to its vast history, Egypt has been intriguing to the Western world dating back to the Greco-Roman period. Ever since Herodotus was introduced to the long line of Egyptian royalty and their strange customs, Egyptomania had firmly taken root in the Western World.<sup>9</sup> With the birth of Egyptomania also came the birth of foreign looting, as those traveling to Egypt wished to bring back artifacts of the civilization that they admired. Early exportation of Egyptian artifacts can be seen in the extensive collections of Egyptian antiquities located throughout the world in museums such as the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Museo Egizio in Turin. While many of these collections feature artifacts obtained through excavations, undoubtedly some were acquired through private donors who may have been associated with looters, although museums are becoming more and more careful in conducting background checks on their purchases.

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<sup>6</sup> Bob Brier and Hoyt Hobbs, *Daily Life of the Ancient Egyptians* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008): 164.

<sup>7</sup> Naguib Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond: Burial Customs of Egyptian Officials* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 2001): 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>9</sup> For a full discussion of the rise of Egyptomania in Greece and Rome until the present day, see Bob Brier, *Egyptomania* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

A majority of the looting occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the mania for collecting Egyptian artifacts was at its peak.<sup>10</sup> At this point in time, Egypt was under the control of the Ottoman Empire, which had no real concern for the historical value of the artifacts but was instead preoccupied with their economic value. After Egypt regained its autonomy from the Ottoman Empire, various pieces of legislation regarding the export of antiquities have been passed, culminating in the current law passed in 1983 that declared all artifacts in Egypt to be the property of the Egyptian government.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, the danger of looting has again been at the forefront of Egyptology. After the Egyptian revolution in 2011, many police and security forces left their positions and allowed looters to have a devastating effect. Although police forces were re-engaged in 2013, looting has continued, as the guardians of the Egyptian antiquities have not been properly armed and are still considerably understaffed.<sup>12</sup> The recent increase in looting and the subsequent loss of the original context of many of Egypt's treasures re-emphasizes the need for studies in the re-contextualization of looted fragments.

The tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, a high-ranking official during the late 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty,<sup>13</sup> “holds the rather sad dispersion record among ancient Egyptian tombs”.<sup>14</sup> Over thirty fragments from

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<sup>10</sup> Salima Ikram, “Collecting and Repatriating Egypt’s Past: Towards a New Nationalism,” in *Contested Cultural Heritage*, edited by Helaine Silverman (New York: Springer Sciences 2010): 141.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>12</sup> Salima Ikram, “The Loss and Looting of Egyptian Antiquities,” *The Epoch Times*, April 29, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> The dating of the tomb is from William Stevenson Smith’s conclusion based on the style of the decoration. See William Stevenson Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* (Boston: Oxford University Press, 1946): 208. Additionally, the names of King Djedkare-Isesi and King Unas, both of whom reigned during the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, appear in the names of a dependent of Ny-ankh-nesut. See Khaled Mahmoud, “Preliminary Report on the Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut at Saqqara,” *GM* 186 (2002): 87.

the tomb have been identified in at least fifteen museums worldwide. One of the centerpieces of Oberlin College's Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM) is such a fragment (Fig. 5, Appendix 1). Purchased in 1943 from art dealer Dr. Jacob Hirsch, the fragment depicts several offering bearers holding animals with hieroglyphs and records some of the titles afforded to Ny-anh-nesut. While this fragment may be one of the highlights of the AMAM ancient art collection due to its size, age, and the quality of the workmanship, very little scholarly work can be accomplished in viewing this piece in isolation. In fact, the fragment does not even mention the name of the tomb owner and its designation to the tomb of Ny-anh-nesut surely must have been based on now lost correspondences with Dr. Hirsch and through a comparison of titles from other fragments.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it is really only possible to state that the fragment came from some high-ranking official's tomb in Egypt, as the fragment does contain inscriptions stating the deceased's titles in the royal court. Aside from the inscriptions, however, there is little hope of learning anything of much value about the Old Kingdom or about Ny-anh-nesut and his iconographic program.

In January of 2000, the study of Ny-anh-nesut's tomb took a giant leap forward. Previously only mentioned in Dr. Hirsch's correspondence with the Cleveland Museum of Art,<sup>16</sup> the mastaba of Ny-anh-nesut was discovered at this time, a discovery prompted by reports of

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<sup>14</sup> Jaromir Malek, "The Provenance of Several Tomb-Reliefs of the Old Kingdom," *SAK* 8 (1980): 205

<sup>15</sup> The curatorial files of the AMAM do not contain any information or scholarship regarding the provenance of the fragment.

<sup>16</sup> See Lawrence Berman, *The Cleveland Museum of Art. Catalogue of Egyptian Art* (Boston: Hudson Hills, 1999): 135. Berman summarizes Hirsch's writing's and states that the tomb was discovered already in ruins in the 1917. However, its precise location was lost after the fact.

robberies in the Sekhemkhet enclosure at Saqqara.<sup>17</sup> Later that year, the tomb was mapped and examined by Ian Mathieson and Anthony Leahy.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequent detailed reports have been carried out since 2000 that have greatly increased the knowledge surrounding the tomb.<sup>19</sup> While these reports have provided detailed investigations into the ruined remains of the tomb, especially in discussing the reliefs that remain within the enclosure, no intensive study has been carried out re-contextualizing the fragments located in museums in conjunction with an investigation of the life of the tomb owner.

However, with the reports on the tomb and with museums worldwide offering increased information on their collections, a detailed study of the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut can now be undertaken. Given that this is the only tomb in Egypt that has been discovered bearing the name Ny-ankh-nesut, many of the fragments in museums have been attributed to the tomb. Most of the fragments have been assigned the provenance of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb based on the inscription of the tomb owner's name or on information provided to the museum from Dr. Jacob Hirsch, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. Other fragments have been placed in the tomb based on keen observations of register sequencing and style of execution.<sup>20</sup> More dubious suppositions regarding a fragment's respective provenance, such as the fact that many of the reliefs came on the art market at around the same time, have also been used.<sup>21</sup> In combining the fragments that

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<sup>17</sup> Anthony Leahy and Ian Mathieson, "The Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut (Re)Discovered," *JEA* 87 (2001): 33.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-42.

<sup>19</sup> See Khaled Daoud, "Notes on the Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, Part I: Reliefs and Inscriptions," *SAK* 36 (2007): 23-30 and Mahmoud, "Preliminary Report," 75-88. Dr. Edward Brovarksi also sent the author of this paper a copy of his unpublished first hand notes on the tomb. Because Dr. Brovarksi plans to publish his notes, they were not used for the present study although he plans to publish a re-construction of the south wall of the offering chapel.

<sup>20</sup> Yvonne Harpur, "The Identity and Positions of Relief Fragments in Museums and Private Collections: Reliefs from various tombs at Saqqara," *JEA* 74 (1988): 59.

<sup>21</sup> See the Detriot Institute of Fine Arts' description of the fragment, ascension number 30.371.



are known to have come from the tomb with the fragments still located in the tomb, albeit not *in situ*,<sup>22</sup> a more complete list of the scenes and themes represented in the iconographic program can be compiled than ever before.

This paper's aim is to place the fragments back into their original context within the tomb, based on what remains in the tomb today and on the meaning and significance behind the iconographic themes. In order to understand the meaning behind the fragments, this paper will begin with an introduction to the purpose of Old Kingdom tombs. Through observing the basic necessities of an Old Kingdom tomb, one can begin to discover how and why Ny-ankh-nesut would have chosen the specific program exhibited in his tomb. Along with illustrating the underlying principles of Egyptian funerary practices, this section will also highlight the variation that can be seen in iconographic programs and how this variation can relate to a tomb owner's personal influence, and thus their agency, in constructing a tomb. In order to further understand the purpose behind iconographic programs, it is essential to uncover possible meaning behind the variation.

With an extensive compilation of fragments and inscriptions known to have come from the tomb, section two of the paper will deal with reconstructing the professional career of Ny-ankh-nesut. Through an investigation into Egyptian funerary practices, traditional tomb layouts, and the life of the tomb owner, one can begin to place the looted fragments from Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb in their original locations. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the iconographic program of the tomb and a tentative placement of the fragments in their original location within the tomb. This final section will relate the variation in theme choices between Ny-ankh-nesut and his contemporaries to the specific intents of the tomb owner, based on his

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<sup>22</sup> There is only one *in situ* relief remaining in the tomb. See Leahy and Mathieson, "The tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut (Re)Discovered," 40.

profession, wealth, and the contemporary ideals of the time. Subsequently, this paper will demonstrate that the variation can be attributed to Ny-ankh-nesut's expression of his agency, as he chose specific scenes to be displayed in his tomb that would have benefited him the most. In particular, Ny-ankh-nesut was concerned with expressing his high status, a concern that he was able to satisfy through choosing an iconographic program that continually evoked his position in the upper-echelon of Egyptian society.

## **Chapter Two: Death, Tombs and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt**

Much scholarship surrounding the study of Egyptian tombs and burial practices in the Old Kingdom centers around the idea that tomb owners, in constructing their tombs, followed a relatively strict set of underlying principles, and indeed, there is a great deal of repetition from tomb to tomb. It has been assumed that the repetition and uniformity of the funerary architecture and decoration of Egyptian tombs is a reflection of the permanence and repetitive cycles that the Egyptians saw around them, with the inundation of the Nile and the movement of the sun being chief among them.<sup>23</sup>

Every Egyptian tomb from the Old Kingdom shared similar features that seemingly support this view of a rigid set of principles and beliefs regarding tomb decoration. For example, every tomb features a false door placed on the Western wall of the offering chapel and most tombs also feature scenes of offering bearers and offering tables.<sup>24</sup> The actual execution and style of the sculpture also exhibited a large amount of repetition, as the figures of tomb owners are nearly always displayed with a head in profile, shoulders in full view, and the lower body in profile, known as composite stance.<sup>25</sup> In order to understand the iconographic program of the specific tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, it is necessary to investigate the universal aspects of Egyptian funerary architecture, aspects that would have been necessary for Ny-ankh-nesut to include in his tomb, and how they relate to the general purpose of the tomb as a provision for the afterlife.

### ***2.1 Houses For Eternity***

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<sup>23</sup> This idea of permanence and repetition in Egyptian art as a result of the natural environment surrounding ancient Egypt can be seen in Rosalie David, *The Ancient Egyptians: Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982): 81-87 and Jaromir Malek, *In the Shadow of the Pyramids: Egypt During the Old Kingdom* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986): 111-115; Gay Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 19-24.

<sup>24</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 21.

The overt function of the tomb for all elite individuals who could afford the construction of one in Egyptian society is clear from the name: the Egyptians referred to their monumental funerary architecture as being houses for eternity. In the “Instruction of Prince Har-djedef”, the purpose of the tomb, or the house of death, is for life.<sup>26</sup> The idea of tombs being houses for eternity - an eternal resting place for the deceased - can be seen in the contrasting building materials used for homes and for the tombs of the living; due to the Egyptian’s realization that life on earth was transitory, houses for the living were built using perishable materials such as mud brick whereas the homes for the deceased, beginning in the early Old Kingdom, were built with imperishable items.<sup>27</sup>

This everlasting nature of the tomb was related to the Egyptians’ ideas regarding the afterlife of non-royal individuals and the soul of the deceased. While little is known about the afterlife of non-royal individuals from texts dating to the Old Kingdom, pyramid texts from the tombs of royalty describe Osiris as commanding the spirits of non-royal individuals “in an earthly afterlife”.<sup>28</sup> Beginning in the Middle Kingdom, coffin texts offer increased insight into the world that elite individuals would have entered upon their death. The coffin texts, by inscribing certain spells and incantations on the coffin of the deceased, aided in the dead’s journey to the Field of Reeds, an ideal land in the afterworld similar to the land of Egypt.<sup>29</sup> While

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<sup>26</sup> For the translation of this section of the instructions of Prince Har-djedef, the son of the Old Kingdom pharaoh Khufu, see Peter Janosi, “The Tombs of Officials: Houses of Eternity” in *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, ed. John P. O’neil (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999): 27.

<sup>27</sup> For a description of the building techniques and materials used by the ancient Egyptians, see Ikram, *Death and Burial*, 143-145.

<sup>28</sup> For an overview of the Pyramid texts dating to the Old Kingdom see Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 34-35.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

no evidence of this destination can be found in the Old Kingdom, it remains probable that this belief was developed out of similar ideas about the afterlife that dated back to the Old Kingdom.

Despite the lack of literary evidence, most scholars agree, in contrast to the celestial afterlife of royalty, the afterlife of a non-royal individual was analogous to life on earth.<sup>30</sup> Although some texts suggest that the deceased traveled to the same celestial region as the king,<sup>31</sup> the vast difference in architecture seems to show that the kings and non-royal individuals of Egypt were preparing for different journeys. While elite individuals built their tombs to resemble houses in a village, royal tombs were built with far more grandeur and were significantly less domestic, with access to the temple being highly restricted.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it is clear from the subterranean burial chamber, an aspect rather unique to non-royal tomb architecture as opposed to skyward reaching pyramids, that the afterlife of an elite individual was located under the earth.<sup>33</sup> The higher accessibility, architecture, and the scenes of so-called “daily life” found throughout the tombs of the elite demonstrate that the tomb was meant to serve as an interface between the living and the deceased. This can further be seen in the non-royal cemeteries of Egypt. Elite tombs were, as J.P. Allen states, “not isolated but one of many in a larger cemetery complex” and were occasionally referred to as a ‘town’.<sup>34</sup>

## ***2.2 House of the Ka***

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<sup>30</sup> This idea can be seen in, *inter alia*, J.P. Allen, “Some Aspects of the Non-royal Afterlife in the Old Kingdom,” in *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology*, ed. Miroslav Barta (Prague: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 2006): 9-18 and Hartwig Altenmüller, “Daily Life in Eternity – The Mastabas and Rock-cut Tombs of Officials” in *Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs*, ed. Regina Schulz and Matthias Seidel (Germany: Konemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2011): 79-93.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, “Non-royal Afterlife,” 9. The text comes from Saqqara Mastaba I, 18. See Margaret Murray, *Saqqara Mastabas* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1905): 18 for a description of the mastaba.

<sup>32</sup> Allen, “Non-royal Afterlife,” 9.

<sup>33</sup> Altenmüller, “Daily Life in Eternity,” 89

<sup>34</sup> Allen, “Non-royal Afterlife,” 10.

This idea of the tomb being an interface between the living and the dead and of the afterlife of a non-royal individual being that of an earthly existence are part of an underlying principle in Egyptian religion that, because the soul continued to live long after the mortal body had passed away, the tomb was a place where the living could nourish and sustain the soul of the deceased. The Egyptians believed that a person was not only made up of a mortal body, but was also composed of a *ren*, or name, the *ka*, or life force, and the *ba*, the soul.<sup>35</sup> Of these aspects, the *ren* and the *ka* are significant for this paper.

Like many Egyptian religious beliefs, the various aspects of a person are not entirely understood and their exact meaning to an Egyptian remains elusive to this day. However, some conclusions can still be drawn from the material and literary evidence that remains. It is clear that the name of an individual was an essential part of a person after their death, as the Egyptians inscribed the name and title of the deceased throughout the tomb and chapel. Visitors to the tomb were “encouraged to recite the tomb owner’s name in order to ensure that he or she would be remembered in the afterlife”.<sup>36</sup> Almost every representation of the deceased, whether in three dimensional statuary or two-dimensional relief engravings, was labeled with the name of the deceased, which ensured that the *ka* of the deceased would eventually find its way back to the correct depiction of the owner. The importance of the name can also be seen in the *damnatio memoriae* that was undertaken by erasing the name of controversial or undesirable figures, a deed that the Egyptians believed completely removed the existence and memory of an individual.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed description of the function and importance of these bodily features, see Salima Ikram, *Death and Burial*, 24-31.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 26.

Along with being a house for eternity, the tomb was also occasionally referred to as the “house of the *ka*”, and one of the main functions of the tomb was to provide the *ka* with the same sustenance that it received while one was living.<sup>38</sup> While a person was alive, his or her *ka* would have been nourished through a regular meal. After death, when the owner could no longer physically take in food, the idea of nourishing the *ka* continued to be an essential aspect of Egyptian funerary beliefs and customs. As mentioned above, the depictions of the deceased with his or her name inscribed on or around the sculpture provided the *ka* with a destination, along with the occasionally mummified body, where it could occupy a resemblance of the deceased and use it as a vehicle to receive offerings and nourishment.<sup>39</sup>

### ***2.3 Sustenance for the Ka***

Because the *ka* was tied to the body and images of the deceased, it was confined to an existence within the tomb and it had to receive offerings from the living as opposed to actively seeking its own food.<sup>40</sup> The *ka* was able to freely move around throughout the tomb and was able to travel in and out of the false door, an essential feature of Egyptian funerary architecture. The Egyptians believed that the false door was a threshold between the living and the dead. The false door was arguably the most important aspect of the tomb and was the primary location where priests would leave offerings for the *ka* to feast on.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout Egyptian history, and having special importance during the early Old Kingdom, funerary cults and estates were established to ensure that the deceased and their *ka* had a continual influx of offerings long after they died. Before death, the wealthy Egyptian individual

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Snape, *Ancient Egyptian Tombs: The Culture of Life and Death* (Malden: Wiley and Blackwell, 2011): 20-21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 28-30.

<sup>41</sup> Allen, “Non-royal Afterlife,” 95.

would normally endow a funerary estate to provide for their funerary services.<sup>42</sup> Most often, the eldest heir to the deceased's household would assume the role of overseeing the agricultural land and the priests and farmhands who were a part of the estate. The estates would not only provide resources for the dead but would also provide a source of income in order to satisfy the *ka*-servants and priests that were appointed to serve on the estate for a certain amount of time each year.<sup>43</sup>

As can be seen in the wills of ancient Egyptians, the maintenance of the deceased's estates was taken very seriously, as most wills included a section stating that if the estate should be neglected and should the needs of the deceased fail to be met, the son would be disinherited. Along with the wills of the deceased, the estates are also known through their depiction in the tombs of elite individuals, as they were represented by females carrying offerings to the deceased with the name of the estate inscribed in front of them.<sup>44</sup> The priests and *ka*-servants of the estate were responsible for performing the funerary rites and for physically placing the offerings that came from the estate in the tomb chapel for the *ka* to feast on. They were also in charge of surveying the funerary feasts, in which the deceased ensured their participation by inscribing requests for offerings on the specific day that the feast would take place. Dating back to the Old Kingdom, as many as 12 festivals of this sort were known to have occurred.<sup>45</sup>

Inevitably, the provision of real food from the estates would have died out over time, either due to a lack of profit for the living or the dying out of the deceased's family. While early on in Egyptian history, the funerary estates probably provided a majority of the sustenance, later

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<sup>42</sup> For a brief summary of the role of funerary estates in Old Kingdom Egypt, see Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 40-41.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43



tomb builders would have noticed the dying out of funerary estates of those who had previously built tombs. Because of the importance of food for the deceased, this observation likely prompted fear and anxiety in future generations regarding their fate after death.

In order to account for the disuse of the funerary estates, the ancient Egyptians had other various ways to ensure a continual supply of food for the *ka*, all of which centered on interaction with the tomb. On the outside of most tomb entrances, a typical tomb owner inscribed a list of his or her achievements and virtues during their earthly existence as a way to impress and possibly persuade visitors to place offerings. The Egyptians believed that the more impressive and morally outstanding a person was during his or her life, the more willing a passerby would be to leave behind offerings. These inscriptions and invocations to visitors simply ask the visitor to place any food or drink in his or her possession at the entrance to the tomb.<sup>46</sup> However, even this was not an infallible means of providing the *ka* with food as the deceased ran the risk of being left with nothing if a visitor did not happen to have any food or drink on his or her person.

#### ***2.4 Magical Food Supply***

It is probable that out of the unreliability of actual food offerings that the belief in the power of the written word and inscribed scenes in tombs grew.<sup>47</sup> Even if the estates fell into disuse and the visitors to the tomb came unequipped with the proper offerings, the ancient Egyptians had another means of providing nourishment for the *ka*: throughout the tomb, spells and incantations were pictured with scenes of offerings and instructions as to the proper means of executing the spells. The Egyptians believed that the spoken and inscribed words had the power to magically produce the food that was depicted in offering table scenes and processional

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 41. Kanawati uses a translation of the elite individual Kaaper from Saqqara, who wrote such a request on the doorjamb of the entrance to his tomb.

<sup>47</sup> The idea of permanent food offerings developing out of the decline of funerary estates is highlighted by David, *The Ancient Egyptians*, 78-82.

scenes. While there is still much debate about the universal meaning of most of the scenes that are shown in Egyptian tombs, most scholars agree that only a part of the meaning behind such activities such as harvesting, animal husbandry, and fishing have to do with the magical supply of food for the *ka*.<sup>48</sup> However, it is clear that some depictions of human activity directly relate to providing the *ka* with sustenance, such as the ubiquitous scene of offering bearers and of the tomb owner seated at the offering table. Around these scenes were inscribed the names of the food being represented. The Egyptians believed that in reciting the name, a visitor would be bringing the food to life for the *ka* to feed on. These long lists included bread, cake, beer, wine, and various types of fish and fowl, inscribed directly above the holder of the offering or above the table where the owner was seated.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the scenes of harvesting, fishing, and hunting, offering bearers and the offering table were present in nearly every tomb, showing that an essential aspect of the purpose of the tomb decoration was to provide a magical supply of food for the deceased.<sup>50</sup>

It appears as though this necessity became even more urgent to the tomb owner around the time of Ny-ankh-nesut in the middle to late 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty. In a recent study of the western wall of tomb chapels, Leo Roeten investigated the interaction between the various decoration themes placed on the western wall of the tomb. Early on in the Old Kingdom, the western wall was seemingly meant to complement the magical supply of food depicted on the false door. While the false door primarily was inscribed with offering bearers and offering lists, the western wall was primarily occupied with scenes from everyday life that were not necessarily directly related to

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<sup>48</sup> For examples of scholarship stating that scenes of everyday life in part provide the deceased with sustenance, see Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 2001: 88-97; Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 67-75; and Altenmuller, "Daily Life in Eternity," 79-93.

<sup>49</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 2001: 42

<sup>50</sup> The percent occurrence of specific themes in iconographic programs will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

the cult of the deceased. However, Roeten observed that, beginning in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, depictions of the magical supply of food began to be placed more frequently on the western wall, as scenes of offering and offering tables were taken from other locations in the tomb and placed on the more important western wall directly next to the false door. Offering lists on the false door became so extensive that they were no longer able to fit on the false door and were thus transferred to the remainder of the western wall. Thus, around the time of Ny-anh-nesut, the increase in offering lists and offering table scenes, especially on the false door and the western wall, reflected the idea that a permanent magical food supply, as opposed to a physical food supply, became the predominant form of sustenance for the *ka* and its importance as a part of tomb decoration programs increased.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Roeten, *Cult Chapel Walls*, 331-341.

### **Chapter Three: The Expression of Agency in Tombs**

While it certainly seems to be the case that the Egyptian tomb was meant to house and nourish the deceased's *ka*, this observation does not necessarily exclude multiple layers of meaning behind a tomb's construction for each specific owner. Although there was a limited amount of stock themes available for a tomb owner to choose from, no two tombs contain the exact same set of themes represented in their decoration and even when tombs do have overlapping themes, a close inspection of the reliefs reveals that details can vary widely from tomb to tomb. Throughout Egyptian history, considerable changes were made to the style and execution of the reliefs<sup>52</sup> and to the themes represented in a tomb's decoration.<sup>53</sup> As no royal decree exists that dictates these changes, it appears as though variations not only within a specific time period but also over centuries are a result of initiatives taken by individual tomb owners and the workshops they employed. While these variations certainly could still have contained the overt meaning of ensuring a safe passage to the Egyptian afterlife and an eternal life after death, recent studies have related the vast differences from tomb to tomb to the agency of the tomb owner in the construction of their tomb.<sup>54</sup> This chapter will demonstrate, through an investigation of how a tomb comes into existence and through a detailed study of variation in ancient tombs, the ways in which societal and personal influences affected the iconographic programs and how these influences relate to a specific tomb owner's expression of agency.

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<sup>52</sup> For a comprehensive history of the style of tomb decoration and how the execution changed over time, see William S. Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> In a case study comparing four different Old Kingdom Tombs, Rene Van Walsem introduces the subject with an in depth analysis of the development of themes available to the tomb owner. See Rene Van Walsem, "Sense and Sensibility: On the Analysis and Interpretation of the Iconography Programs of Four Old Kingdom Elite Tombs," *IBAES* 6 (2006): 283-297.

<sup>54</sup> See Rene Van Walsem, *Diversification and Variation In Old Kingdom Funerary Iconography as an Expression of a Need for 'Individuality'*, forthcoming, and Vischak, "Agency", 255-276.

### *3.1 Agency and Egyptology*

In general, the basic approach to studies of agency in archaeology focuses on the influential role of the people who created the material culture that is studied today. According to H. Martin Wobst, agency based studies assume that the people who create material are more than just a vehicle through which objects are made; they are informed, and thus their actions are informed, through their personal experience and understanding of history and social structure.<sup>55</sup> Agency studies place an increased emphasis on the importance of the motivations and actions of agents.

However, this approach has not been commonly used in Egyptological studies. According to Deborah Vischak, studies of the Old Kingdom often focus on religious concepts and royalty as being the deciding factors for what occurs in Egyptian society and in the construction of elite tombs, with the elite individuals themselves “as having little sense of alternate possibilities and little option for engaging in them.”<sup>56</sup> A considerable amount of scholarship dealing with Old Kingdom iconographic programs seeks to interpret the meaning of a scene or a group of related scenes by viewing them in isolation and by dealing solely with the matter depicted in the image. These studies of iconographic programs assume that a specific scene can either have a literal or a symbolic meaning.<sup>57</sup> An agency-based approach to tomb decoration assumes that specific scenes and themes can have another layer of meaning to the tomb owner; beyond the scene’s literal or symbolic meaning, the owner would also have had his

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<sup>55</sup> H. Martin Wobst, “Agency in (Spice of) Material Culture,” in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. Marcia-Anne Dobres and John Robb (New York: Routledge, 2000): 40

<sup>56</sup> Vischak, “Agency,” 255-262.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 256. Vischak provides an example of these different interpretations as displayed in fishing scenes. The fishing scene can either have the literal meaning of being an actual activity that the tomb owner enjoyed or the symbolic meaning of the tomb owner controlling the chaotic forces of nature.

or her own interpretation of the scene based on personal experiences. This deeper layer of meaning can be manifested in changes of style and iconography, in the locations of themes within a tomb, and in the themes chosen by the tomb owner to be displayed in his or her tomb.

### ***3.2 Tomb Construction***

Before delving into the variations in decoration from tomb to tomb and how it relates to an individual's agency, it is useful to discuss how and when a tomb came into existence. Especially during the Old Kingdom in royal cemeteries, such as Saqqara, it was customary for an elite individual to receive a plot of land within the necropolis from the king as a sign of royal favor.<sup>58</sup> Based on an individual's status and relationship to the king, they would be given a larger or more commanding plot of land within the cemetery. The cemeteries were highly organized and although they may seem to be clustered and irregular at times, this is more likely a result of changes in kings as opposed to individuals being free to build wherever they wanted. In fact, at Saqqara, which is apparently not as organized and systematic as other cemeteries such as the one at Giza, there are countless examples of tomb owners specifically stating that the king granted an area within the necropolis to them. For example, in the tomb of Iri/Tetiseneb, the owner stated: "as for this tomb which I made in the necropolis, it was the king who granted its place for me, as one who is honored before the king, one who does what his lord favors."<sup>59</sup>

For the most part, it is clear that Egyptian tombs were built during the life of the owner, which implies that he or she probably would have been involved in the construction of the tomb. While it is not clear when exactly it was customary for construction of tombs to be carried out, it seemed to be the case that, most often, an owner would begin construction on the tomb once he

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<sup>58</sup> Ann Roth, "The Organization of Royal Cemeteries at Saqqara in the Old Kingdom," *JARCE* 25 (1988): 202.

<sup>59</sup> The translation of this text was taken from Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 6.

or she had reached what they believed to be the peak of their career.<sup>60</sup> This would most likely be the period of time when the owner would be granted access to a plot of land in the royal necropolis and would also be the time when the owner had amassed a majority of their wealth. However, there remain a few examples of an individual receiving a promotion after they had completed construction on their tomb, before their professional career had reached its apex, which again confirms that the tomb would have been built during the life of the owner.<sup>61</sup>

The time it took to construct a tomb would likely have varied considerably from tomb to tomb depending on the size and lavishness of its design. Some of the larger and more ornate tombs surely would have been completed after the death of the owner, in which case it seemed to be customary to complete the tomb under the supervision of a relative close to the deceased, one who would be able to carry on the intentions of the owner.<sup>62</sup>

### ***3.3 Variation in Tomb Design and Decoration***

While it may seem as though the style of Egyptian art and the architecture of elite tombs was very stagnant throughout the rule of the Pharaohs, a close examination clearly displays that there were many changes throughout history, including the Old Kingdom.<sup>63</sup> Although these changes have been mostly viewed as a result of a decline in technical ability on the part of the artists, they may also be viewed as changes in ideology. An example of one of these changes is the expansion of the tomb. By the time of Ny-an-kh-nesut, the tombs of the Old Kingdom had advanced from a simple one-room mastaba chapel to a many roomed burial ground, a change

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<sup>60</sup> Strudwick, *Administration*, 7-8.

<sup>61</sup> See Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 11 for the example of the tomb of Seshemnefer, where the ranking of vizier, the highest title awarded to a non-royal Egyptian, was only found at the entrance. If Seshemenefer was a vizier during the construction of the tomb, this title surely would occur more frequently throughout the tomb.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>63</sup> An extensive description of Egyptian art and the changes therein can be found in William S. Smith, *Art and Architecture*.

that can best be seen in the tomb of Mereruka.<sup>64</sup> It is impossible to pinpoint a specific time when all tombs began to be expanded, but the process was drawn out over the entirety of the Old Kingdom. It is reasonable to assume that the expansion of the tomb grew out of an individual's desire to further showcase the wealth that allowed them to provide for increased tomb space and to include a wider array of themes that would not have had space in one-room mastabas. Although the significance behind these developments in construction and style may remain elusive to this day, it can be assumed that these changes were a result of the "real, specific, tomb owners who responded to developments or chose to take advantage of new opportunities and to execute their programs differently."<sup>65</sup>

Not only can changes in style over time be viewed as a result of a tomb owner's agency, but the specific themes chosen by the owner can also be viewed in this same manner. There are many examples, in the form of inscriptions within tombs, of tomb owners stating that they alone financed the construction of the tomb and the artisans who created the decoration.<sup>66</sup> Because of this supervisory role and funding from their own means, it follows that tomb owners would have been free to choose which group of craftsmen to hire, a choice which presumably related to a tomb owner's individual preference or to his or her financial standing. In consultation with the workshop, the tomb owner would have been able to choose which scenes to include in their tomb, either based on the workshop's ability or again on the tomb owner's individual preference. While later time periods, such as the Middle Kingdom, tend to depict specific moments in

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<sup>64</sup> The tomb of Mereruka features over 30 decorated rooms with a pillared courtyard and the typical offering chapel featuring a false door.

<sup>65</sup> Vischak, "Agency," 258.

<sup>66</sup> For example, Kanawati translates an inscription in the tomb of Mehi/Mehnes, from Saqqara, as reading "I made payments to the stonemasons so that they were satisfied." Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*. 8. The tomb of Mereruka also provides multiple examples of a tomb owner specifically stating that he or she paid the artisans from their own funds.



history such as military campaigns, the Old Kingdom seldom shows these incidental themes. The Middle Kingdom tombs at Beni Hasan display war scenes while the tomb of Djehutihotep displays the colossus of the tomb owner being transported to his funerary site.<sup>67</sup> It might seem logical that, if tomb owners had free choice in what was depicted in their tombs, they would have chosen to depict some of the incidental themes that were specific to their own life. However, this lack of incidental themes in the Old Kingdom should not dissuade one from believing that tomb owners, to some degree, were able to influence their tomb decoration. It is much more logical that this trend grew out of the Egyptian belief that the images had to be eternal. Therefore, the owner had to depict, for example, generic agricultural scenes to separate the tomb decoration from the world of the living. If a specific harvest from the tomb owner's life were depicted, it would have been inherently transitory as it would have been an instance in the world of the living.<sup>68</sup>

Although Old Kingdom tomb owners were not at liberty to depict incidental themes, they would still have been able to personalize their tomb through their choice of specific themes. By the time of Djedefre, who ruled in the 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty, all of the major themes such as agricultural scenes and fishing and fowling scenes, can be attested.<sup>69</sup> However, upon a quick investigation of a few tombs from the Old Kingdom, it becomes clear that the major themes do not occur in every tomb. In fact, there is an incredible amount of variety, variety that can be attributed to a tomb

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<sup>67</sup> For these specific examples and more examples of so called "incidental" scenes in Egyptian tomb decorations, see Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 108-112

<sup>68</sup> Kent Weeks, "Art, Word, and the Egyptian World View," in *Egyptology and the Social Sciences*, ed. Kent Weeks (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1979): 68-69

<sup>69</sup> Van Walsem, "Sense and Sensibility," 286. See page 306, Appendix 1 for a list of the 15 themes that the author included as being major themes.

owner's manipulation of the stock themes available to him for a specific purpose.<sup>70</sup> In choosing one theme over another to be displayed in his or her tomb, the tomb owner revealed a certain pre-disposition towards a particular scene that held special significance for them. For instance, if one tomb owner chose to include a marsh scene in their tomb versus another who chose not to include a similar scene, the significance behind marsh scenes for the former tomb owner was different from the latter's and thus contained a particular meaning to the former that went beyond the generally accepted view of the public.

### ***3.4 Emulation and Status Symbols***

This subsidiary meaning beyond what is actually pictured in the theme can manifest itself in multiple forms. As pointed out by Vischak, Egyptian tombs surely were not built in a vacuum; a tomb owner would be able to see other tombs that had already been constructed or were in the process of being constructed and they would have had contact with other workshops than the one that they employed.<sup>71</sup> Because of this, a tomb owner would have had the opportunity to emulate one of his neighbors, possibly one of the highest rank a non-royal individual could hope to achieve such as the vizierate. The idea of emulation being a form of flattery can be clearly seen during the New Kingdom reigns of Thutmose III and his son Amenhotep II, as, due to their supposed love for hunting and games, the inclusion of chariot hunting scenes dramatically increased.<sup>72</sup> While this example does not pertain necessarily to the Old Kingdom, there is no reason to assume that the idea of emulation as being a form of flattery was not also practiced during the Old Kingdom between two parties of non-royals. In copying a scene from another

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<sup>70</sup> As will be used later in this paper, the Leiden Mastaba Project, or Mastabase, contains a database of over 300 tombs from the Old Kingdom and the themes that can be found within them. Rene Van Walsem, *Mastabase: The Leiden Mastaba Project* (Leiden: Peeters/Leiden University Press, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> Vischak, "Agency," 257.

<sup>72</sup> Ikram, *Death and Burial*, 179.

person's tomb, that scene has a new layer of meaning for the copier than it did for the original owner.

Tombs were, in many ways, meant to serve as a status symbol and therefore many iconographic scenes can also be interpreted as indicators of an owner's high status. For example, although various theories have been put forth regarding the meaning and purpose behind the depiction of funerary processions in tombs, these scenes can simply be read as a statement of the tomb owner's wealth, as most of the scenes contain elaborate furniture and various luxury items, all of which would have signaled a high status on the part of the owner.<sup>73</sup> Even if the tomb owner was not actually a part of such an elaborate funeral, a future visitor to the tomb would not be aware of this fact and the visitors' interpretation would be that the owner had a lavish funeral. As the tomb would have needed frequent supervisory visits from priests and was probably an object of family excursions, the tomb decoration offered the owner a chance to show off his life and his wealth to his contemporaries.<sup>74</sup> Overt evidence for tomb owners being concerned with how visitors viewed their status can be seen in the tomb of Iri/Tetiseneb in which Iri, who did not hire artists to decorate the tomb, assured viewers that he did this out of love for his father rather than that he could not afford to hire anyone.<sup>75</sup>

The aforementioned ideas of emulation and tombs as status symbols for the deceased rely upon the assumption that Egyptian tombs were frequently visited and entered. In order for a tomb owner to emulate a neighboring tomb, he had to have known what decoration lay within.

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<sup>73</sup> For an in depth approach to viewing the funerary scenes as displays of material wealth, see Van Walsem, "Sense and Sensibility," 297-301. Most funerary scenes contain beds with canopies, multiple chairs and chests, and various clothes and ointments, extra items that would have signified an individual's wealth.

<sup>74</sup> Ann Roth, "The Social Aspects of Death," in *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt*, ed Sue D'Auria, Peter Lacovara, and Catharine H Roehrig (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988: 54

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

Similarly, if decorations of tombs were meant to be used as a symbol of status for the tomb owner, in order to be effective in this manner, the decorations would have had to be viewed by passersby. While it has already been discussed that tombs would have been the destination for many family excursions and for priests, scholars do not necessarily agree upon whether or not everyday visitors would have been able to enter deep into the depths of the mastaba.<sup>76</sup> However, as evidenced by the aforementioned inscription in the tomb of Kaaper, the lengthy inscriptions of tomb owners achievements, and the occasional amusing scene and joke found at the entrances to tombs, it is safe to assume that tombs would have been accessible to at least a portion of Egyptian society, as these inscriptions all would have been meant to lure visitors inwards.<sup>77</sup>

### ***3.5 Location of Themes***

Once a tomb owner had chosen the specific themes that would later decorate his tomb, there were further choices that needed to be made regarding the iconographic program that would alter the meaning and importance behind scenes. Beyond the actual scene choices, a tomb owner had to decide where to place certain themes within the tomb. A theme placed in the outer chamber of a tomb, which was not related to direct contact with the deceased, had a different meaning to the owner than the same theme placed in the offering chapel. As a general rule, as one moved from the outer chambers of the tomb to the inner chambers and the offering chapel, scenes of daily life decreased while offering scenes and funerary scenes increased.<sup>78</sup> However, this was not necessarily always the case and variation in this trend would have changed the meaning behind the themes that broke the trend. As mentioned above, Egyptian cemeteries were

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<sup>76</sup> The topic of tomb visitation is not well documented. It is clear that priests and family members would have visited the tomb, but very little, if any, scholarship has been written specifically on a passerby's access to the tomb.

<sup>77</sup> For examples of amusing scenes and jokes being placed towards the entrance to tombs, see Roth, "Social Aspects," 55.

<sup>78</sup> Ikram, *Death and Burial*, 177

not desolate areas, but were often swarming with workmen constructing tombs and family and priests visiting the tombs of their relatives.<sup>79</sup> Thus, a tomb owner could express his or her agency by placing a particularly impressive sculpture towards the entrance of the tomb in the hope that it would impress passersby and draw them into the tomb. Such a theme would therefore serve a different purpose than the same theme placed in an inner chamber.

The walls of tombs were divided into registers, and placement of a scene at various levels of the register would also have indicated the relative importance of the theme. As the lower sections of tomb walls were not decorated, the lowest registers of the decorated section would have been around eye level to a visitor, and thus more noticeable than scenes located in higher registers. By placing a scene in a lower register and in an outer chamber, a tomb owner was actively attempting to draw the attention of the visitor to the scene, a scene of special importance to the owner that was not meant to be overlooked.<sup>80</sup> These scenes could also be executed with increased detail and boldness to further catch the attention of a visitor. An owner could further enhance the importance of a scene by adding texts to it. Not every scene had texts associated with it and by including texts, the owner once again draws the attention of the visitor to the scene. Texts would have had an extra cost to the owner, as they would have had to be inscribed, and by including them, the owner demonstrates the importance of the scene in his or her willingness to spend extra resources on the depiction.

While it could possibly be argued that it was the artist who chose which scenes to include and where to depict them based on what he was skilled in or comfortable depicting, since the artists were chosen by the tomb owner, the owner would have still have had a say in the material

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<sup>79</sup> Roth, "Social Aspects," 54.

<sup>80</sup> Van Walsem, "Sense and Sensibility," 296. Van Walsem refers to the position of the themes in his paper as Wall Position Index or WPIs.

depicted as he or she could choose a specific artist who was well-known, for instance, for his ability to depict agricultural scenes.

In viewing changes in tomb construction and the iconographic programs within them as being a result of a tomb owner's agency, it becomes clear that, in order to fully understand the significance behind the decoration of a tomb and to view the separate themes in a single context, one must investigate the history of the tomb owner. In the case of this study, that tomb owner is Ny-ankh-nesut.

## **Chapter Four: The Life of Ny-ankh-nesut**

As mentioned previously, tombs would, in some ways, have been symbols of status and an opportunity to demonstrate the owner's wealth. Tombs also had to draw visitors in so as to convince them to leave offerings. In order to fulfill these needs, the ancient Egyptians placed a great deal of importance in inscribing their deeds and ranks as a part of their tomb decoration. For the most part, titles and ranks are confined to locations in the tomb where the tomb owner is shown. The titles would usually follow the name of the deceased and were thus incorporated into the idea that the tomb had to be clearly assigned to a specific individual so the *ka* could find its way to a depiction of the owner. Although only a portion of the decorative program of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb remains, many of the fragments that still remain in the tomb or have been assigned to the tomb in later years contain useful inscriptions on them.<sup>81</sup> As shall be shown, there is a great deal of repetition in the ranks and titles seen in the extant fragments, possibly showing that what does remain today were the most important titles to Ny-ankh-nesut, regardless of whether or not he held other positions in Egyptian society.

### ***4.1 The Bureaucratic Life of Ny-ankh-nesut***

Upon viewing the titles and ranks from the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, it is clear that he had a successful career in Egyptian society based around two separate political pathways. The first of these pathways was as a royal attendant, an administrative position in the Egyptian government with close ties to the Pharaoh. While the duties of many positions in the Egyptian government are not precisely known and many of the titles do not translate smoothly into English (an

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<sup>81</sup> Khaled Daoud, "Professions and Career of Ni-ankh-nesut," *SAK* 37 (2008): 49-68. Daoud's paper on the inscriptions found in the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut contains a list of 31 titles and ranks found in the tomb and in fragments from the tomb throughout the world. All subsequent translations and transcriptions of titles in this paper found in Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb are taken from Daoud.

Egyptian mayor, for example, probably had alternative duties to what modern western society expects of a mayor) it is still possible to partially recreate the Egyptian administrative system in the Old Kingdom. Without a doubt, the King had the most authority in political, religious, and economic affairs as the sole ruler of Egypt. It was his duty to ensure the concept of *ma'at*, which, to the Egyptians, probably related to justice and a balancing of cosmologies.<sup>82</sup>

However, as the task of maintaining order and economic success throughout a kingdom as large as Egypt would have been impossible for any one individual, the king surrounded himself with an extensive network of bureaucratic officials. The highest-ranking official during the Old Kingdom was that of vizier, who was the king's deputy for administrative matters and also served as his chief of justice.<sup>83</sup> Underneath the vizier, the roles of officials varied greatly over time and their specific functions are not known well, although these specialized individuals would have overseen public works, finance, grain storage, and agriculture. Most titles given to the deceased had more to do with indicating an individual's relationship to the king as opposed to his or her actual administrative duties for the purpose of impressing visitors. Thus, scholars have grouped the positions associated with closeness to the king as part of a royal court made up of individuals who could be servants and attendants or royal cupbearers.<sup>84</sup>

Judging by the inscriptions found in this tomb, most of Ny-anh-nesut's bureaucratic positions were associated with the royal court. One of the titles held by Ny-anh-nesut was hand of the *im3*. *Im3* is usually translated as kind or gracious and therefore the position reads "gracious of hand."<sup>85</sup> While there is a lack of textual evidence regarding the specific role of

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<sup>82</sup> For an overview of the role of the monarchs in ancient Egypt, see Aidan Dodson, "The Monarchy," in *The Egyptian World*, ed. Toby Wilkinson (New York: Routledge, 2010): 75-90.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>85</sup> Daoud, "Professions," 52.



holders of this title, it was clearly a common office in the court and was most often associated with those who held other positions such as being a royal attendant or assistant. This title can be seen in tombs dating back to the first dynasty and was always a part of the royal court but did not become a popular and important title until the second half of the fifth dynasty, when it began to be used as a way to show one's high standing in the royal court. This development is clearly evidenced by the large amount of viziers who held the title at this time.<sup>86</sup> Another way to distinguish importance of a particular title is to investigate where the title occurs in a series of titles, with an earlier occurrence signifying greater importance.<sup>87</sup> The importance of the title of *im3* can be seen in this manner as well, as decrees from the sixth dynasty show that the individual with this title is addressed only after the vizier and the Overseer of all works.<sup>88</sup>

Many of Ny-ankh-nesut's other titles relating to the first political pathway that he undertook as a member of the royal court deal with his closeness to the Pharaoh as opposed to actual duties and professions. For instance, multiple inscriptions state that Ny-ankh-nesut was "he who is in the heart of his lord" or "he who is in the heart of the king in every place of his."<sup>89</sup> Some of his other duties continue his close association with the king, as he was also "Keeper of the headdress", a title that was probably associated with maintenance and the actual adornment of the head of the Pharaoh and is once again granted to those who had other high-ranking offices in the court.<sup>90</sup> In viewing the administrative positions held by Ny-ankh-nesut, it is clear that he was a successful individual in the Egyptian court with close ties to the King and held

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 53. According to Daoud, out of the 34 holders of this office at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty and the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup>, 14 of them were also viziers.

<sup>87</sup> Baer, *Ranks and Title*, 221-240.

<sup>88</sup> Daoud, "Professions," 54.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

administrative positions that were associated with a great deal of political power, slightly below the role of vizier.

#### ***4.2 High Priest of Heliopolis***

At some point in his political career, however, Ny-ankh-nesut either changed direction or took up another occupation outside of his work in the royal court. Alongside his titles that mark him as a royal attendant, Ny-ankh-nesut also proudly boasted his position in the cult of Re at Heliopolis. His titles relating to his cultic work include ‘Greatest of seers of Heliopolis’ and ‘Privy to the secrets of the god’s words’.<sup>91</sup> Ny-ankh-nesut also stated in his tomb that he was the ‘priest of souls of Heliopolis’, a separate religious entity from the cult of Re. Ny-ankh-nesut is the only Old Kingdom priest who mentions being the priest of souls as well as the high priest, as maintaining the cult of souls of Heliopolis was part of the duties of the high priest. A separate priesthood for the souls had yet to be established during the life of Ny-ankh-nesut, making this title an anomaly. However, it appears as though the priest of souls, later in Egyptian history, was closely connected with the kingship and therefore Ny-ankh-nesut could have possibly included the title as a way to further his assertion that he was close with the king.<sup>92</sup>

It was not until the Middle Kingdom that high priests of Heliopolis were solely involved in the religious sphere. During this time, it was highly uncommon for high priests to hold any other significant position in the Egyptian administration. However, in the time of the Old Kingdom, it was not altogether uncommon for an individual to be part of the cult at Heliopolis as well as a member of the royal court.<sup>93</sup> It is probable that Ny-ankh-nesut continued to be a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 59-61.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 68.

member of the royal court and have close interaction with the king even after his important appointment as the high priest of Heliopolis.

Because many high priests from the Old Kingdom also held positions in the royal court, it seems as though there was no *cursus honorum* that one had to climb within the cultic sphere to receive this high ranking. It is more likely, rather, that one such as Ny-ankh-nesut who held both positions was granted the position of high priest because of his loyalty and close connection with whoever was king at the time. As this was the highest position one could expect to achieve in the Cult of Re, it makes sense that someone as high up in the royal court as Ny-ankh-nesut would receive such a designation. Due to the power that cults could obtain as a separate entity from the monarchy, Egyptian pharaohs, from the Old Kingdom onwards, usually appointed members of the royal family or the vizier to the position so that the King could maintain a centralized authority over the priesthood.<sup>94</sup> Although Ny-ankh-nesut was not a member of the royal family and, as far as one can tell from the extant fragments, was also not a vizier, his appointment as high priest would have been an exceptional honor and shows that he was one of the most successful individuals of his time.

During the Old Kingdom, the cult of Re at Heliopolis was far and away the most prominent and influential cult of the time. During the fifth dynasty, after kings had already begun to adopt the title ‘son of Re’, it became the royal cult and the kings began to incorporate the solar epithet in their royal titularies.<sup>95</sup> The cult grew to such a state of prominence that, during the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, it actually began to rival the status of the king and thus caused the aforementioned precautions on the part of the king in choosing the priests. The epithet ‘son of Re’ could also be a

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<sup>94</sup> Rosalie David, “The Temple Priesthood,” in *The Egyptian World*, ed. Toby Wilkinson (New York: Routledge, 2010): 107

<sup>95</sup> David, *The Ancient Egyptians*, 49-52.

sign of the growing influence of the cult, as, opposed to being one of the gods, the king was now referred to as a son of the god. While the king, as the head of the Egyptian economy, seemingly had the power to withdraw funds from the cults if they became too powerful, he did not exhibit this influence and during this time the king's patronage towards the cult of Re actually increased. The kings financed great temples for the cult, an expense of money and time that possibly played a role in the decreasing monumental nature of Pharaonic tombs.<sup>96</sup> It is unclear exactly what caused the kings to promote an entity that was a clear rival to their authority, although it may be possible that kings owed their accession to the throne to the cult and therefore were expected to offer assistance to the god and his servants.<sup>97</sup> Regardless, with the backing of the monarchy, the cult of Re was continually fueled by an influx of money and the priests involved in the cult were honored above all other priests and above most other administrative assistants.

### ***4.3 Conclusion***

Through the extant titles and ranks that Ny-anekh-nesut deemed worthy to include in his tomb decoration, it is clear that he was a highly ranked individual in Egyptian society. His success in the royal court of the king of Egypt led to the opportunity for him to pursue a separate, religious sphere of life as the high priest of Heliopolis. Although not a member of the royal family and not a vizier, it is clear that Ny-anekh-nesut had achieved greatness during his life and the necessary relationship with the king and acquired the funds to build a tomb in the royal necropolis of Saqqara.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 50.

## **Chapter Five: A Reconstruction of the Iconographic Program from Ny-ankh-Nesut's Tomb**

Having recreated the professional career of Ny-ankh-nesut, it is necessary to turn to the other major concern during his life; namely his tomb and the decoration within. After the re-discovery of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb in 2000 and with provenance studies placing artifacts from museums in the tomb, more iconographic information than ever before regarding the tomb can be consulted. The surveys carried out by Mathieson and Leahy, Mahmoud, and Daoud, further the information surrounding Ny-ankh-nesut's iconographic program, as researchers can now consult a more complete list of scenes for Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb, including both museum fragments and fragments that remain in the tomb today.<sup>98</sup> In order to better understand Ny-ankh-nesut's personal conception of the significance behind tomb construction, this chapter seeks to place the looted fragments in their original location within the tomb based on their iconographic significance and the location of fragments still in the tomb today. A reconstruction of the plan of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb can be seen in figure 1 in Appendix 1 and a visual placement of the fragments overlaying the plan can be found in Appendix 3. The fragments will be discussed in the following sections: images of the deceased, cultic scenes (funerary, offering, and sacrifice scenes), and scenes of 'daily life'.<sup>99</sup>

### ***5.1 Images of the Deceased***

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<sup>98</sup> Daoud, "Notes," 30 provides a list of the themes known to have been displayed in Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb.

<sup>99</sup> There has been much debate over whether or not to designate scenes as 'daily life'. However, for the purpose of this study, grouping agricultural scenes, fishing scenes, marsh scenes, etc. into one category of 'daily life' scenes is merely an organizational tool. The actual meaning behind these scenes and whether or not they were actually intended to be interpreted as being scenes from the daily life of tomb owners will be discussed. For an analysis of inappropriate labeling in Egyptology, see Vera Vasiljevic, "Terminology and Interpretation in Studies on Decoration of Private Tombs," *JSAS* 19 (2003): 135-142.

Images of the deceased can be seen in figures 6-10 in Appendix 1. As mentioned above, images of the deceased are highly common throughout all Old Kingdom tombs, as they would have been used as a way for the deceased to greet visitors and for the deceased to connect with his or her *ka*. The fragment seen in figure 6 was carved in sunk relief. The use of sunk relief began in the 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty at Giza and towards the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, sunk relief became especially common in inscriptions throughout the tomb, with a focus on the false door.<sup>100</sup> Sunk relief on the false door, a style incorporated by Ny-ankh-nesut, was indicative of the high status of the owner and a decoration that Ny-ankh-nesut surely would have been able to afford.<sup>101</sup> However, the two images of Ny-ankh-nesut could not have originally been located there as the size of the fragments does not fit the panel and the inscriptions on the fragments do not follow the inscriptions on the panel.<sup>102</sup>

Due to its nature, sunk relief was traditionally used on outside walls, as bright sunlight has the effect of enhancing sunk relief.<sup>103</sup> However, it also became customary to use sunk relief on any door jamb or lintel and on pillars throughout the tomb. While it is not entirely clear why this was the case, as some sunk reliefs were located on underground entrances that could not capture any light, it probably became customary to do so out of the idea that doors were thresholds to new rooms, just as the outer wall of the tomb was a threshold to the inner wall.

As the relief in figure 6 cannot have originally come from the false door, the next areas to investigate are the outer entrance to the tomb and the entrances between the inner chambers. The main entryway to the tomb has a somewhat complete decorative scheme, with an inscribed door

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<sup>100</sup> Smith, *A History*, 162.

<sup>101</sup> Strudwick, *Administration*, 24.

<sup>102</sup> Jacobus van Dijk, "Two Relief Slabs of Ny-ankh-nesut," in *Objects for Eternity*, ed. Carol Andres and Jacobus van Dijk (Darmstadt: Verlag Philipp Van Zabern, 2006): 39.

<sup>103</sup> Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 25.

and figures of the deceased at the bottom of the two rows of hieroglyphs.<sup>104</sup> This means that the sunk figure of the deceased could not have originally been placed here, as the decoration remains complete with figures of the deceased. The same conclusion holds true for the entranceways to the inner chambers, as there is no sign of looting from these areas and the entranceways appear to merely be decorated with horizontal colored bands.<sup>105</sup> Thus, the most reasonable assumption of the original location of the fragment in the Meijer collection is on a pillar within the tomb. As pointed out by van Dijk, the spelling of Ny-ankh-nesut's name and the depiction of the deceased on the sunk reliefs is identical to two other sunk reliefs of the deceased found on pillars in room D of the tomb.<sup>106</sup> As there are no other intact pillars from the tomb that remain today, it can only be assumed that these fragments came from a now destroyed pillar or an unexcavated section of the tomb.<sup>107</sup>

As for the raised relief images of the deceased, the fragments seen in figures 7-10 could have originally been located in various sections of the tomb. The two fragments depicting the owner in a seated position would probably have been associated with an offering or offering table scene. The scene of the tomb owner seated at the offering table is one of the most common scenes in Egyptian tomb decoration and can be found in nearly every tomb.<sup>108</sup> As this type of scene is directly related to the cultic function of the tomb and the sustenance for the *ka*, it is most often found in the innermost chambers of the tomb, especially in the offering chapel itself. In fact, the most common decoration on the panel of the false door was a seated figure of the

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<sup>104</sup> Leahy and Mathieson, "The Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut (Re)Discovered," 34.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>106</sup> Van Dijk, "Two Relief Slabs," 39.

<sup>107</sup> The use of sunk relief on pillars can be seen in, among others, the tomb of Mereruka in his pillared hall, where the owner is shown in sunk relief on multiple pillars.

<sup>108</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 115.

deceased at an offering table.<sup>109</sup> Upon inspection of the remains of Ny-ankh-nesut's false door, it becomes clear that the panel has been almost entirely destroyed but not sawn off, as would be the case if it were looted. Thus the fragments could not have originally been placed on the false door. However, as highlighted by Roeten and discussed in Chapter 3, from the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty on, offering table scenes also began to be placed on the other sections of the chapel walls due to limited space on the false door.<sup>110</sup> Their cultic function, however, limited their placement within multi-room mastabas to the actual offering chapel.<sup>111</sup> In the report on the tomb, Mahmoud noted that among the fragments in the false-door room there were small sections of the offering table scene in the rubble.<sup>112</sup> It follows that these two-seated figures of Ny-ankh-nesut probably were from the offering chapel of his tomb, possibly on the west wall as a continuation of the offering list from the false door.

As opposed to the two fragments depicting the owner in a seated position, figures 9 and 10 display Ny-ankh-nesut standing. Figure 9 depicts Ny-ankh-nesut standing with a staff while figure 10 displays the owner on a skiff in an action pose as if preparing to throw an object. Throughout the tomb, various rooms would contain scenes such as fishing, fowling, or agricultural pursuits. In scenes such as fishing and fowling, which, in many ways, were considered to be recreational activities, the tomb owner himself would be shown taking an active role in the pursuit. However, in scenes such as agricultural activities or craft making, in which slaves would have carried out the bulk of the work, the owner maintained a passive, supervisory

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<sup>109</sup> Strudwick, *Administration*, 18-21.

<sup>110</sup> Roeten, *Cult Chapel Walls*, 191-192.

<sup>111</sup> An example of multiple images of the deceased in front of an offering table on the western wall alone can be seen in, among others, the tomb of Werirenptah from Saqqara.

<sup>112</sup> Mahmoud, "Preliminary Report," 87.



role. The owner would undertake a similar passive role as he or she awaited the arrival of offerings from several registers depicted in front of them.

The separate active and passive roles of the owner can be seen in figures 9 and 10. Figure 10 was probably part of a larger marsh scene, as the owner is shown fowling with a throw stick. As will be discussed in detail below in the section dealing with daily life scenes, in Room E in the plan, fragments remain that depict birds and other wildlife above a papyrus clump.<sup>113</sup> These are very common elements in marsh scenes throughout Egyptian art and it is probable that figure 10 was originally a part of this scene. Figure 9's original location is much more dubious, as it could have originally been placed at the head of a multitude of scenes. Its precise original location therefore cannot be established with any amount of certainty.

## 5.2 *Cultic Scenes*

Figures 5 and 11-15 all represent offering bearers and are directly related to sustenance for the *ka*. Therefore, they are grouped together here under the title of *cultic scenes*. Scenes of offering bearers are arguably the most common iconographic themes in Egyptian Art, from the Old Kingdom onwards. They were meant to provide the deceased with an eternal supply of food in his journey to and future life in the afterworld. However, their sole purpose was not necessarily to provide sustenance for the deceased. The Egyptians went through great trouble to have the names of the animals being led for sacrifice inscribed in the tomb and, in doing so, created long lists emphasizing the sheer volume of offerings being brought to them and the many domesticated animals that were under their estates' control. These lists would not only have ensured a continual supply of food, but also would have displayed the wealth and success of the tomb owner. As Altenmuller puts it, the result of counting the animals "always turns out to be

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<sup>113</sup> Leahy and Mathieson, "The Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut (Re)Discovered," 39.

highly favorable – any other result would have been highly inappropriate for a tomb representation”.<sup>114</sup>

Because of this dual purpose of some offering scenes, their location is not necessarily restricted to the offering chapel, where physical offerings would have been left and where the chapel priests would have recited offering spells from the depictions on the wall. These scenes could have also been located in the outer chambers of multi-room mastabas as a way to impress visitors and convince them of the greatness of the owner. However, the offering scenes that would have most likely been placed in the outer chambers would have been scenes containing inscriptions naming the animals and counting the list of domesticated animals under the control of the owner, as the list would have impressed everyday visitors. Some offering scenes, however, do not seem to care about counting the animals being offered, with the inscriptions only serving to name the owner and his titles. These scenes seem to be solely concerned with providing food for the deceased as opposed to being testaments to the owner’s wealth.

This contrast can be seen in two offering scenes now located in the Cleveland Museum of Art, figures 11 and 12. In figure 12, the inscriptions over the animals clearly specify the names of the offerings, stating above one of the desert animals “bringing the young oryx.”<sup>115</sup> However, in figure 11, the inscriptions between the offering bearers merely name the offering bearers and their titles, such as Seshemnefer, “controller of the booth”, and do not mention the animals being led.<sup>116</sup> Another offering bearer scene with similar inscriptions occurs on the fragment from Oberlin’s Allen Memorial Art Museum (fig. 5). If Ny-anh-nesut was attempting to impress

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<sup>114</sup> Altenmuller, “Daily Life in Eternity,” 87.

<sup>115</sup> Berman, *Catalogue of Egyptian Art*, 141.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

visitors with the amount of animals being brought to him, it follows that he would have desired the animals to be labeled and counted before the visitors, which is not done in this fragment.

With these distinctions in mind, it is probable that figures 12-14, all of which display attendants leading in named animals, would have originally been located in the outer chambers of the tomb for visitors to see. Figure 14, which displays a servant leading in desert animals, could be a logical continuation of a desert scene fragment found in Room C of the tomb.<sup>117</sup> As figures 12 and 13 have no parallel fragment still located in the tomb, it is likely that they would have been placed in Room B, the first room into which a visitor would have stepped. These high quality, bold reliefs would immediately have impressed visitors upon entering the tomb.

Another cultic scene that does not display offering bearers but clearly depicts the preparation of food offerings can be seen in figure 16. In this fragment, two registers display a series of attendants butchering 6 cows, a very common scene in Egyptian tombs. The butchering scene is carved in exquisitely executed bold, raised-relief. The complexity of the action in the fragment as evidenced by the active movements of the individuals butchering the cattle surely would have been able to catch the attention of a visitor. For that reason, it seems as though figure 16 would have also been located toward the entrance. It could have been a continuation of the idea of cattle being led to sacrifice shown in figure 12 and would therefore have originally been located in Room B. It follows that both figures 12 and 16 would have been located on the western wall of Room B, due to the movement from right to left depicted in figure 12. The western wall of tombs would also have been the primary locus of offerings, as can be seen in the

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<sup>117</sup> Leahy and Mathieson, "The Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut (Re)Discovered," 38. Leahy describes a similar scene featuring a man leading three long-horned desert animals with a second man restraining wild animals.

almost universal placement of the false door on the west wall. It thus is logical to assume that a butchering scene in preparation for offerings would have also been found there.

As for figures 5, 11, and 15, which all display attendants carrying individual offerings with lines of hieroglyphs between them stating the titles of the bearers, they would have originally been located within the offering chapel, Room F. Upon closer inspection, it seems as though they all would have been part of the same sequence of registers on a single wall in the chapel. As pointed out by Berman, all of the scenes contain multiple bearers moving towards the right with hieroglyphs separating each figure.<sup>118</sup> All scenes show similar offerings. With these striking similarities, it makes sense that they would have originally been grouped together, possibly on the western wall of the chapel alongside the false door.

Another section of cultic scenes would be scenes related to the funeral for the deceased. As can be seen in figure 17, Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb also contained a funerary procession. This fragment, from the National Scottish Museum, contains the highly rare name of Nynemty, which also occurs on the fragments from the CMA and it is thus highly probable that this fragment, though it does not mention the name of Ny-ankh-nesut, also originated from the tomb.<sup>119</sup> As most depictions of funerary scenes, including the procession of coffins, funerary meals, and embalming scenes occurred close to the false door in the offering chapel, it is likely that figure 17 also would have been placed here.

### 5.3 'Daily Life' Scenes

The category of 'Daily Life' scenes consists of all other scene types that can be found in a tomb, including marsh activities, desert hunts, and agricultural works. Figures 18-20 and many more fragments described in the surveys of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb fall into this category. Table 1

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<sup>118</sup> Berman, *Catalogue of Egyptian Art*, 140.

<sup>119</sup> Malek, "Provenance of Several Tomb-Reliefs," 204.

in Appendix 2 displays the results from the Mastabase searches on the themes and sub-themes represented by the fragments. The Mastabase, or the Leiden Mastaba Project, contains information on the ‘daily life’ scenes and their accompanying texts from 337 elite tombs from the Memphite area in the Old Kingdom. Because of Ny-anekh-nesut’s tentative dating between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty and the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty, for the research presented here, the mastabase searches were confined to tombs dated between the reigns of Niuserre to the end of Pepi I.<sup>120</sup> Table 1 displays the percent occurrence and percent orientation of the sub-themes found in Ny-anekh-nesut’s tomb throughout the 272 tombs in the aforementioned range.

Figure 18 displays three partially preserved registers of various agricultural activities. It has been attributed to the tomb of Ny-anekh-nesut through its connection with Jacob Hirsch, the dealer of the piece, and the mentioning of the name Nynemty. The earliest example of a complete agricultural scene, with plowing, sowing, and harvesting, occurs in the early 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty tomb of Neferirtenef.<sup>121</sup> The top register displays a series of servants sowing and plowing with cows. The middle register depicts the flax harvest with inscriptions stating, among other things, “good for your ka”.<sup>122</sup> The lowest register, of which only the top survives, depicts the grain harvest, as can be seen in the tools used by the servants.<sup>123</sup> It is one of the largest remaining fragments from the tomb and is sculpted in a high quality bold relief reminiscent of the time period. None of the reports on the tomb of Ny-anekh-nesut mention the remains of any other agricultural scene. Through the keen observations of Yvonne Harpur, a fragment from the Cincinnati Museum of Art (Fig. 21), the provenance of which was previously unknown, has been connected to figure 18. The connection was based on register sequence, style of execution, and

<sup>120</sup> Van Walsem, *Mastabase: The Leiden Mastaba Project*.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, *A History*, 188.

<sup>122</sup> Berman, *Catalogue of Egyptian Art*, 137.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

the nudity of the plowmen, as figure 21 continues the plowing scene depicted in the top register of figure 18.<sup>124</sup> The Egyptians often displayed sequential actions within the same scene through the use of viewing registers from top to bottom. Thus, the movement from plowing and planting to various types of harvesting in the lower registers was highly common within tombs that contained agricultural scenes.<sup>125</sup>

Traditionally, because of the Egyptian belief that images could be transformed into real life through magical spells, agricultural scenes have been interpreted as continuing the eternal supply of food for the deceased.<sup>126</sup> This seems to be, at least partially, the purpose behind Ny-anekh-nesut's inclusion of this scene, as the aforementioned "good for your ka" inscription above the harvest seems to indicate this sentiment. This purpose again seems plausible in viewing the fact that, during the development of agricultural scenes in the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, some tombs became so crowded with depictions of farming that traditional offering scenes were removed from the tomb.<sup>127</sup> However, it is hard to believe that this was the main purpose behind agricultural scenes. As pointed out by Ken Weeks, only certain foodstuffs are depicted in harvest scenes, such as grain and flax.<sup>128</sup> Although these would have been staples in the Egyptian diet, if providing nourishment for the deceased was the sole purpose of these scenes, are we supposed to believe that the Egyptians were expected to just eat grain, flax, and figs?

Along with the other scenes that will be discussed in this category, agricultural activities have been interpreted as part of the everyday life of the tomb owner in the hereafter. However, in

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<sup>124</sup> Harpur, "Identity and Positions," 60.

<sup>125</sup> For example, see the West wall of the offering chapel of Mereruka and the south wall of the offering chapel of Sekhem-anekh-ptah.

<sup>126</sup> C.J. Eyre, "Work and Organization of Work in the New Kingdom," in *Labor in the Ancient East*, ed. MA Powell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987): 27.

<sup>127</sup> Smith, *A History*, 200.

<sup>128</sup> Weeks, "Art, Word, and the Egyptian Worldview," 62.

the New Kingdom, a period during which the first depictions of the actual Egyptian hereafter occur alongside depictions of agricultural activities in this life, agricultural activities that are specific to the netherworld are considerably different from those depicting agriculture in the realm of the living.<sup>129</sup>

Lastly, these scenes can also be read as a testament to the tomb owner's wealth. Not every Egyptian or Egyptian tomb owner would have had the means to own a great agricultural estate. In depicting one in their tomb, the owner gives the impression that he or she does indeed have a large estate, regardless of whether or not this is true.<sup>130</sup> This idea that only a portion of tomb owners could enjoy owning a large agricultural estate could also explain the relatively low percentage of tombs from the time period that contain such scenes, as can be seen in Table 1.

Based on the scene content and its dual purpose of providing sustenance for the deceased while also stating the tomb owner's extreme wealth, it follows that figure 18 would have been located towards the entrance to the tomb. Furthermore, as can be seen in Table 1, agricultural subthemes of the flax and grain harvest have an overwhelming tendency to be placed on the eastern walls of tombs, with more than half of the tombs from the time period exhibiting such a trend. This could possibly be in reference to the idea that agricultural activities in the Old Kingdom were related to the realm of the living, as can be seen in the fact that their depiction at that period was radically different from agricultural activities in the netherworld, as depicted in the New Kingdom. Furthermore, according to Roeten's study, hunting scenes and agriculture

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<sup>129</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 116.

<sup>130</sup> In Snape, *Death and Burial*, 59-61, the author discusses the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty tomb of Nefer, whose most significant title is that of 'Overseer of Singers' and whose tomb contains a series of registers depicting Nefer overseeing a wide range of agricultural activities on an estate. As pointed out by Snape, it is highly unlikely that someone with Nefer's title would in reality be a significant landowner.

were normally placed in the same room of multi-room chambers.<sup>131</sup> While the intention behind this placement is unclear, it may have to do with the fact that in the hunting scene, the owner is shown in charge of an activity that would have been pursued by the wealthy in their leisure time and in the agricultural scene, the owner is stating his high class by controlling a large estate. Thus, the two scenes could have been connected through their establishment of the tomb owner's high status. In the remains of Room C, Daoud describes a desert-hunting scene featuring hunting dogs chasing an antelope and a feline.<sup>132</sup> As there is no other depiction of agricultural activities in the tomb, it follows that figure 18 would also be placed in room C on the eastern wall. The placement on the eastern wall also makes sense due to the direction in which the figures in the fragment are facing (all of the figures face left to right). With a placement on the eastern wall of Room C, the action of the scene faces south, in towards the offering chapel of the tomb and thus would have drawn a visitor in.

The other two 'daily life' scenes that are a part of this section can be grouped together based on their similar scene content, both of which depict marsh activity. Similar to figure 18, figure 19 displays one of the larger fragments from the tomb and also consists of three horizontal registers. It has been assigned to the tomb of Ny-anekh-nesut based on the occurrence of the owner's name in the inscriptions. Hieroglyphs and humans and animals involved in marsh activities occupy the registers. The top register depicts 13 men gathering papyrus plants and making rope and a boat out of the plants. The middle register displays a group of boatmen fighting with each other using rods, oars, and rope. Of the two men not shown in boats, one is shown attacking another boat from underwater while the other is shown on land carrying handfuls of lotus blossoms. The fighting men are shown in complicated action poses and the

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<sup>131</sup> Roeten, *Cult Chapel Walls*, 273-274.

<sup>132</sup> Daoud, "Notes," 24-26.



composition displays the extreme skill on the part of the craftsman in charge of the decoration. Only the upper half of the lowest register remains, which depicts a man leading a bull and three men carrying flowers and fish. Some of the fish have already been sliced open. This fragment was probably part of a larger marsh scene including the depiction of the tomb owner standing on a papyrus skiff (Fig. 10).

Figure 20 depicts two men leading a herd of cattle across a river and is joined together with another fragment depicting a group of men fishing and thus was probably part of larger marsh scene in conjunction with figure 19. Its assignment to the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut is somewhat dubious, as it does not contain the name of the owner and was not purchased from Jacob Hirsch. However, most scholars generally agree now that it belongs to the tomb based on stylistic similarities with other fragments known to have come from the tomb and based on the fact that it first appeared on the art market at around the same time as the other fragments.<sup>133</sup>

There is much debate as to the iconographic significance of marsh activity and its role in the overall tomb iconography. At first, it seems as though fishing and fowling scenes, which often display the caught animals being processed for food, add to the general theme of sustenance for the *ka*. However, the offering lists that occur in almost every tomb as part of the offering table scene never include fish and seafood as part of the formula. It therefore seems as though these scenes were not primarily concerned with producing food for the tomb owner.<sup>134</sup>

In a very general sense, fishing, fowling, and hunting scenes all contribute to the tomb owner's role in establishing order in the chaotic wild. Similar scenes appear in the tombs of

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<sup>133</sup> See the DIA's description of the fragment, ascension number 30.371.

<sup>134</sup> Altenmuller, "Daily Life in Eternity," 86.

royalty, where they deal with the king overcoming forces relating to chaos, which can be equated with death. Thus, the owner triumphs over death and ensures his passage into the afterlife.<sup>135</sup>

Other, deeper layers of interpretation involve the assumption that the scene relates to rebirth and the sexual union between the owner and his or her spouse based on the wordplay evident in inscriptions between the Egyptian words for ‘shoot’ and ‘impregnate’.<sup>136</sup> As death was seen as more of a transition to a new life, this meaning surely would have resonated with the ancient Egyptians, who would have desired to ensure their own rebirth through the imagery in their tomb. However, there is little other evidence for this layer of meaning and thus it is somewhat of a stretch of the imagination. In order for this interpretation to make sense, the wife of the tomb owner would also have to be accompanying the owner, which is not always the case and sometimes a son, as in the case of Ny-anekh-nesut, would be with the owner.<sup>137</sup> Further claims for the regenerative powers of marsh scenes stem from the fact that the tomb owner is usually shown spearing tilapia, a fish that to the Egyptians had regenerative powers. However, in these cases, the owner is also shown spearing a Nile-perch, which does not have any regenerative powers.<sup>138</sup> Lastly, no texts accompanying marsh scenes mention any sort of double meaning involving reproduction and sexual union.

It is far more likely that marsh scenes, similar to agricultural activities, were meant as a way to establish the tomb owner’s high status and ability to enjoy leisure activities. This establishment of the tomb owner’s high status can be seen, first of all, in the hunting boatmen in the middle register of figure 19. Some scholars have interpreted this scene as being a mock battle

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<sup>135</sup> Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, 69.

<sup>136</sup> Altenmuller, “Daily Life in Eternity,” 91

<sup>137</sup> Erika Feucht, “Fishing and Fowling with the Spear and Throw-stick Reconsidered,” *SA* 14 (1992): 164.

<sup>138</sup> Rene Van Walsem, *Iconography of Old Kingdom Elite Tombs: Analysis and Interpretation, Theoretical and Methodological Aspects* (Walpole: Peters/Leuven, 2005): 73.

performed for the amusement of the tomb owner.<sup>139</sup> However, as Andrey Bolshakov points out, the action in the scenes indicates “rather fast and hard stabs” as opposed to mock fighting thrusts and most scenes depict boatmen viciously threatening their counterparts.<sup>140</sup> As opposed to being a mock fight, the scene is more likely meant to show the owner’s slaves extreme eagerness to be the first group to present offerings. In many of the scenes of boatmen fighting, a great deal of care is taken to preserve offerings for the owner, making this interpretation likely.<sup>141</sup> This can be seen in figure 19, as one of the servants rushes on land with offerings to Ny-ankh-nesut. In choosing a theme such as the boatmen fighting, Ny-ankh-nesut has shown his high status by displaying excessively fervent servants under his command. By placing the scene in his tomb, he has preserved this loyalty for eternity.

The interpretation of marsh activities as a means to display the tomb owner’s high status can also be seen in the inscriptions that usually accompany such pursuits. As opposed to relating to the reproductive nature of such scenes or to the supply of food for the *ka*, most inscriptions relate to the tomb owner’s enjoyment in participating in such adventures. Many tombs feature inscriptions declaring the beautiful scenery of the marsh and the entertaining nature of catching and killing fish and fowl.<sup>142</sup> All of these inscriptions show that activities such as the ones depicted in marsh scenes brought a great deal of enjoyment and happiness to the tomb owner. Because of their high status, the owner was able to participate in activities that they enjoyed and that lesser status individuals would not have had the leisure time to pursue.

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<sup>139</sup> See D. Dunham, “Some Old Kingdom Reliefs,” *BMFA* 27 (1929): 36 and William S. Smith, *Ancient Egyptian Art as Represented in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1960): 60 for references to the scene being a mock fight.

<sup>140</sup> Andrey Bolshakov, “The Scene of the Boatmen Fighting in Old Kingdom Tomb Representations,” *BSEG* 17 (1993): 34.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>142</sup> Fuecht, 1992: 165-166.

Due to the fact that marsh scenes and fishing and fowling activities were, at least in part, meant to establish a tomb owner's high status through the loyalty of his or her servants and through his or her participation in leisure activities, these scenes were probably meant to impress visitors as opposed to strictly being for the benefit of the deceased. Therefore, it seems likely that figures 19 and 20 would have been located in the outer chambers of the tomb, enabling visitors to look upon them. As mentioned above, Room E in the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut contains other fragments depicting birds in a papyrus clump, which would have originally been a part of a marsh scene. Thus it follows that these two fragments in question would have originally been placed in the long corridor of Room E. As can be seen in table 1, the sub-themes of fishing with a dragnet, boatmen fighting, and tomb owner fowling with a throw stick all occur most frequently on the east walls of the tomb. This follows the action of the fragments in question, as both of the fragments display movement from left to right. This also fits with the depiction of Ny-ankh-nesut in the Worcester museum, as he faces left and would have looked over the activities proceeding before him. These fragments not only further the establishment of Ny-ankh-nesut's high status but also draw visitors deeper into the tomb towards the offering chapel.

### **Chapter Six: Analysis of Ny-ankh-nesut's Iconographic Program**

Having placed the original fragments in their likely location within the tomb and having discussed the possible meanings behind the fragments, it is now possible to undertake an analysis of the complete iconographic program. In order to understand how the fragments interacted with each other and their collective meaning and purpose, it is not enough to turn to the reconstructed display in isolation. One must take into account the tomb owner's life, the time period, and the multiple layers of purpose for a tomb, in addition to the location of and the connection between the different iconographic themes present. Beyond a basic reconstruction of the original location of fragments from the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, this chapter seeks to identify the ways in which the iconographic program chosen by Ny-ankh-nesut, on the one hand, conforms to the basic necessities required in tombs to achieve an eternal afterlife and, on the other hand, exhibits the tomb owner's own preferential treatment towards certain scenes and themes. This chapter will demonstrate that Ny-ankh-nesut was able to provide his *ka* with an eternal supply of food necessary for the afterlife while also highlighting his wealth through specific theme choices and his high status through his emulation of certain details from another elite individual buried in the necropoleis at Saqqara.

Although much of the iconographic program from the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut has been discovered through recent reports on the tomb and provenance studies of museum fragments, it remains impossible to know the full extent of the decoration. In curatorial files from the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) and the Allen Memorial Art Museum (AMAM), correspondences with the art dealer Dr. Jacob Hirsch reveal the fact that much of the original program almost certainly still remains unidentified. In 1947, nearly twenty years after Hirsch sold 5 fragments to the CMA and four years after he sold the fragment to the AMAM, he still

had 18 fragments of Egyptian reliefs in his personal collection, some of which may have originally come from the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut. As the author was unable to track down the history of Hirsch's personal collection, it is unclear how many more fragments from Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb were in his collection. Also in the curatorial files was evidence for further fragments from Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb being sold at an art auction in Geneva, fragments that have not been tracked down to this day.<sup>143</sup> The Kawam Brothers, who sold the Detroit Institute of Arts their fragment, are not known to have acquired other fragments from the tomb, but this does not rule out the possibility that more fragments were in their possession at that time.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, it is impossible to know how many fragments eventually ended up in private collections throughout the world, collections that have not released information on their inventory to the public.

Therefore, due to the inability to access all of the fragments originally located in the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, any analysis of the iconographic program, with an emphasis on what can be learned through viewing the fragments as having originated from a tomb owner's expression of his agency, must rely solely on analysis of the known extant fragments. Previous studies of individuality and agency in Egyptian tombs have not only focused on the agency that the tomb owner exhibited by including certain scenes, but also on evidence for agency in the fact that tomb owners specifically decided to omit certain scenes. However, this approach cannot be undertaken for Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb as it is unclear whether, for example, Ny-ankh-nesut decided to omit scenes of craftsmen constructing the tomb or whether these scenes have been lost to looting and private collections.

### ***6.1 Sustenance for the Ka and Regeneration***

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<sup>143</sup> See the AMAM's curatorial files.

<sup>144</sup> See the DIA's description of ascension number 30.371.

Through an examination of the scene content in Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb, it is clear that many of his decorative scenes, at least in part, dealt with providing sustenance for the *ka* and with marking the tomb as being that of Ny-ankh-nesut. The decoration therefore satisfied the universal purpose of the Egyptian tomb; namely, to provide an eternal home for the *ka*. As can be seen in figures 5, 11, and 15, which display offering bearers, Ny-ankh-nesut was, like his contemporaries, concerned with his sustenance in the afterlife.

As shown in Table 1, various depictions of offering bearers were extremely common, to such an extent that offering bearers seemed to be an essential aspect of the tomb and something the owner could not avoid including in his decoration. The necessity of these themes must have revolved around the fact that their sole purpose was to provide the owner with sustenance, as it is hard to imagine an alternative meaning other than the provisioning of food. The tomb owner, not actually being displayed and partaking in the event, surely would not have included the scene to suggest an activity that he or she wanted to continue in the netherworld. Furthermore, offering bearer scenes were highly generic, normally depicting the bearers holding fruits and farm animals. Aside from the quality of the sculpture, it is difficult to decipher one scene from another. No scene displays a uniquely extravagant procession, with especially expensive or regal gifts, making it highly unlikely that the owner would have used offering bearer scenes to display their wealth.

Furthermore, offering bearers and offering table scenes were the bare minimum decoration required for tombs, as can be seen in the fact that some tombs only included these scenes or stela depicting these scenes, with the rest of the chapel being undecorated.<sup>145</sup> The sustenance of the *ka* would have been above all other desires of the tomb owner when he or she

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<sup>145</sup> See, *inter alia*, the stela of Atjetka at El-Hawawish.

designed their decorative program. From this idea and from the observation that some tombs only included scenes of offering bearers, it is clear that their sole function was to provide sustenance for the deceased.

Due to this fact it may seem as though there is little room for investigating agency in the form of offering bearer scenes. However, a part of agency includes the idea that certain scenes and areas of the tomb would have been decorated with varying degrees of skill and precision. For example, certain scenes could have been more important to the tomb owner, possibly due to the prominence of their position within the tomb or due to the secondary meanings of the scene, and therefore the owner could have ensured the quality of their execution by instructing a more experienced or well-respected artists to focus on such scenes.

It was not uncommon for tombs to exhibit various degrees of quality within their decoration, usually interpreted as a result of varying levels of skill within large teams of craftsmen.<sup>146</sup> For example, in the tomb of Ankhmahor, the lower registers of many of the wall scenes are better executed with more details than those in the upper registers.<sup>147</sup> Because the lower registers would have been on eye level with a visitor, it follows that the more skilled artists would have been assigned these sections. It is therefore possible that Ny-ankh-nesut, or the master craftsmen on the project, assigned the offering bearer scenes to the less skilled workers in the shop due to its lack of detail and extreme commonness during the Old Kingdom.

In examining the three reliefs depicting processions of offering bearers, it becomes clear that these scenes were executed with a lesser quality than the scenes of daily life or the large images of the owner. In comparing the figures shown in figures 5 and 15 with figure 8, 18, and 19, minute differences in the quality and detail of the execution can be observed. For instance,

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<sup>146</sup> David, *The Ancient Egyptians*, 82 and Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 73.

<sup>147</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 73.



the musculature of the seated figure of Ny-ankh-nesut, as seen especially in the biceps and triceps, is shown in much greater detail than the offering bearers. It is clear from figure 19 that a highly skilled artist was in charge of sculpting the scenes, as can be seen in the wide range of actions exhibited by the sailors and the complex arrangement of the boatmen jousting scene. While these actions are not necessarily conducive to an offering procession, it is clear that more time, effort, and money were put towards constructing the boat scene than the offering bearer scene.

As Ny-ankh-nesut would have been in charge of the construction of the sculptures, he would have been able to decide which scenes took precedence. It seems as though Ny-ankh-nesut, because of the ubiquitous nature of offering bearer scenes, their sole purpose of providing sustenance, and their location deep within the tomb, did not feel the need to highlight such scenes. Regardless of their quality, once the offerings were displayed, the images would have been capable of coming to life and performing their function. Tomb owners could afford to depict these utilitarian scenes at a lower level of quality with no consequence to their well being in the afterlife. Although choosing to depict the offering bearers at a lower level of quality than the other scenes is an exhibition of Ny-ankh-nesut's agency, it is difficult to relate this display of agency to Ny-ankh-nesut's personal life. He merely seems to have highlighted other sections of his iconographic program as will be discussed in detail below.

As for the images of the deceased, in order for the *ka* to receive the offerings laid within the tomb, as discussed previously, it had to assume the form and figure of the deceased by occupying statues or depictions of the deceased on the walls. While no statues remain in the tomb today, possibly due to looting or extreme deterioration, it is clear from the previous chapter that Ny-ankh-nesut's decorative program would have satisfied this function of the tomb as well.

Countless images of the deceased can be found in the fragments, images that the *ka* would have been able to occupy.

Most of the other fragments from Ny-anekh-nesut's tomb also deal with the universal purpose of ensuring sustenance and regeneration for the deceased. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the leading of desert animals and domesticated animals represented in figures 12 and 14 can be read as sacrificial offerings to the deceased. This seems even more likely given the fact that Ny-anekh-nesut's tomb also contained a cattle-butcher scene, clearly a reference to his *ka*'s need for food. One of the interpretations of marsh scenes centers on the fact that these depictions had regenerative powers and thus would have aided the tomb owner in his journey to the afterlife. Finally, agricultural scenes would also have provided additional food for Ny-anekh-nesut's *ka*. However, these are not the only plausible meanings behind the iconographic themes. The following analysis deals with the alternative meanings that can be contained in 'daily life scenes' and seeks to highlight the themes' specific significance to Ny-anekh-nesut.

## ***6.2 'Daily Life' Scenes and the Exposition of Wealth and Status***

While it is clear that Ny-anekh-nesut meant to provide his *ka* with the proper support that it needed to survive, his tomb also contained various 'daily life' scenes that were not necessarily solely concerned with sustenance or regeneration. His choices of marsh scenes, desert hunts, and agricultural activities, although by no means uncommon scenes, are far from essential aspects of every tomb during the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> dynasties in the Old Kingdom, as can be seen in table 1.

When viewing the iconographic program as a whole that Ny-anekh-nesut chose for his tomb with the intent to infer the specific meaning of the tomb decoration to the owner himself, one ought to look for patterns in the themes represented and the possible meanings behind them.

If multiple scenes within Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb can be related to a single meaning and purpose, it follows that Ny-ankh-nesut would have desired his decoration to highlight these aspects.

In the case of the funerary, marsh, desert, and agricultural scenes in Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb, they could all have served the purpose of stating the owner's wealth and elite status and, in doing so, impressing visitors. Even the recurrent theme of butchering cattle can, in a way, be read as a testament to his wealth as, unlike many other tombs, Ny-ankh-nesut decided to devote two full registers and 6 cattle to his butchering scene.<sup>148</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, it is likely that elaborate funerary scenes, at least in part, were meant to indicate the high status of the deceased. As can be seen in figure 17, Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb contained a highly elaborate funerary procession that, in part, included the procession of a statue of the deceased. Within this fragment, elaborate funerary furniture is also displayed and it is plausible that this fragment is just a section of a larger procession that contained other expensive funerary equipment. Ny-ankh-nesut has thus displayed his extreme wealth and status to any visitor who observed the scene of his funerary procession.

The fact that Ny-ankh-nesut chose to display a series of agricultural activities in his tomb indicates that he was expressing his literal ownership of a large estate or, at the very least, creating that impression on a stranger passing by the tomb. While many Egyptians could have considered themselves farmers and farm workers, only a small portion of elite individuals could claim to own an estate.<sup>149</sup> The agricultural scene in figure 18 establishes Ny-ankh-nesut as the owner of a farm and as having many people working under his command. It is likely that this

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<sup>148</sup> Mereruka and Ptahhotep II, both considered to be wealthy and successful individuals, devote only one register and at most four animals to butchering scenes.

<sup>149</sup> Leslie Warden, *Pottery and Economy in Old Kingdom Egypt* (Boston: Brill, 2013): 5.

was in fact the case for Ny-ankh-nesut, who had become a highly influential religious figure and was also a high-ranking bureaucrat.

The probable location of the marsh and desert scenes based on *in situ* reliefs, as discussed in the previous chapter, would have been near the entrance of the tomb and noticeable to visitors. While the marsh scenes could have benefited the owner by stressing the theme of re-birth, its original location within the tomb could have also affected the significance of the fragment. Because of the fragment's probable original location towards the entrance, in a highly visible section of the tomb, it follows that it would, in part, have been meant to impress and draw visitors into the tomb and therefore contained deeper significance beyond re-birth.

It is more likely that these scenes also stressed the tomb owner's wealth. Hunting in the desert would almost certainly have been an activity enjoyed by the elite as a leisure activity.<sup>150</sup> The extremely low percent occurrence of 5.1% also suggests that this scene would have been an eye-catching component to Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb. Due to an elite individual's extreme wealth and ownership of large estates that included workers, he or she would have had the time, unlike farmhands and workers tasked with monumental architecture, to enjoy hunting.

Similarly, fishing and fowling scenes that Ny-ankh-nesut chose to display in his tomb would have also stressed the fact that he had enough wealth to enjoy copious amounts of leisure activity. As evidenced by inscriptions accompanying fishing and fowling scenes, the Egyptians clearly viewed these activities as sources of enjoyment and pleasure, with, for example, inscriptions from an 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty tomb stating "a happy day when we go down to the marsh that we may snare birds".<sup>151</sup> Although this inscription came from a much later time period than Ny-

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<sup>150</sup> See Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 102-103 for an interpretation of hunting as a sport and recreational activity for the elite.

<sup>151</sup> Feucht, 1992: 166.

ankh-nesut, there is no reason to doubt that this same attitude towards fishing resonated with the elite during the Old Kingdom. Whether or not he actually participated in these adventures, a visitor to the tomb would have surely known that fishing, fowling, and hunting were trademarks of the life of elite individuals and would be left with the impression that Ny-ankh-nesut was an extremely wealthy tomb owner. Ny-ankh-nesut also appears to be stressing the fact that he did indeed participate in these activities, with figure 10 and a fragment still within the tomb both depicting the tomb owner hunting on a papyrus skiff.<sup>152</sup>

Unlike agricultural scenes, within the category of marsh activities and desert hunts, there is evidence for a great variety of subthemes in tombs. According to Yvonne Harpur's database, Oxford Expedition to Egypt (OEE), a total of 28 different subthemes of marsh activities, including fighting boatmen, papyrus boat making, and various forms of fishing, can be attested to in Old Kingdom tombs while 48 different variations of desert hunt scenes can be found.<sup>153</sup> This means that, within his representations of marsh activities and desert hunting scenes, Ny-ankh-nesut had further room to display his agency and state his wealth and high status than he did with the agricultural sequence. In viewing the subthemes that he chose for his tomb, it is clear that he has taken advantage of the wide range of details available to an Egyptian tomb owner.

Within the theme of marsh activities, as can be seen in figure 19, Ny-ankh-nesut chose to display, among other subthemes, a scene of boatmen fighting, a sub-theme that occurs in only 10.1% of tombs from the time period. As discussed in the previous chapter, most scholars now

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<sup>152</sup> Leahy and Mathieson, "The Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut (Re)Discovered," 39.

<sup>153</sup> Linacre College, Oxford (2006) *Oxford Expedition to Egypt: Scene-details Database*, [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/oeo\\_ahrc\\_2006/](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/oeo_ahrc_2006/). The high number of subthemes with marsh activities available to tomb owners is in stark contrast to the number of subthemes of agricultural activities. For agricultural activities, the OEE only records the harvesting sequence represented in Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb and the filling of granaries.

agree that the subtheme of boatmen fighting was meant to depict an actual fight as opposed to a mock fight for the enjoyment of the owner. The only plausible explanation for such a scene is to record the servants of the owner as being entirely devoted to the well being of their master and willing to fight with each other in order to be the first ones to bring the catch to the tomb owner. In doing so, the servants have made their master out to be a benevolent and high standing individual, one worthy of such admiration and devotion. Again, it does not matter whether or not Ny-ankh-nesut's servants indeed acted in the manner in which they are portrayed; it is merely the impression that is given from the scene that would have been important to Ny-ankh-nesut. The idea of fighting boatmen as an indication of high status is also indicated by the presence of the scene in the tombs of viziers, such as Ptahhotep II and Ti, who, at the highest position in the Egyptian bureaucracy that one could hope to attain, would surely have demanded the sort of devotion seen in this theme.

Beyond the subtheme of boatmen fighting, Ny-ankh-nesut also chose to include the quite rare scene (3.3%) of gutting fish and the presentation of fish as offerings. Although it is not entirely clear why, as they certainly would have made up an extensive portion of an Egyptian's diet, fish were never a part of the feast of the dead and never occurred in the offering lists of food.<sup>154</sup> Fish were probably considered to be inappropriate for the cleanliness and purity of the tomb. According to Kanawati, a fish is used as the determinative for the words abomination, detested and stink.<sup>155</sup> A spell from the book of the dead reads "one shall recite this spell only when he is pure and spotless, without eating goats or fish or going near women".<sup>156</sup> Because of this connotation associated with fish, it follows that fish offerings would have been an unpopular

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<sup>154</sup> Altenmuller, "Daily Life in Eternity," 86.

<sup>155</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 93.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

scene to depict in one's tomb. However, as can be seen in the lowest register figure 19, Ny-anh-nesut made just such a choice. In terms of promoting the high status of Ny-anh-nesut's wealth, it doesn't appear that this detail would have been useful to the owner. It could be argued that this subtheme furthers the devotion of the servants, as they are once again providing a service to their master in preparing his food. However, this interpretation is highly skeptical at best and, even if taken as likely, probably would not have been so important to the owner that he would choose to bring the uncleanly idea of eating fish into his tomb. Therefore, Ny-anh-nesut must have turned to another source of inspiration, possibly the tomb of one of his neighbors.

### ***6.3 Evidence for Emulation***

Perhaps, by including the procession of fish offerings, Ny-anh-nesut was attempting to emulate another tomb owner who had deemed the scene worthy of inclusion. As mentioned in the previous chapter, emulation was a high form of flattery. However, emulation could also serve the purpose of increasing the image of a tomb owner's high status. In emulating the tomb of another high-ranking official such as a vizier, a tomb owner would have, in some ways, been equating himself and his success to another. If, after having noticed the tomb of a vizier, the visitor to a low-ranking official's tomb observed similarities between the two tombs, he or she surely would have held the lower-ranking official in higher esteem. In terms of the iconographic program of Ny-anh-nesut, it appears as though, at least in part, he has emulated the iconographic program of or used the same group of craftsmen as the nearby and well-documented shared tomb of Akhetotep and Ptahhotep II.<sup>157</sup> Even if Ny-anh-nesut himself was not aware of the iconographic program within the chapel of Ptahhotep, he could have hired the same craftsmen to construct his decoration and thus associate himself with Ptahhotep's chapel.

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<sup>157</sup> For an overview of the chapel of Ptahhotep II, see Yvonne Harpur and Paolo Scremin, *The Chapel of Ptahhotep: Scene Details* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Either by choosing the same workshop that Ptahhotep II used or by ordering his own unique workshop to copy some of the details in Ptahhotep II's chapel, Ny-anh-nesut could have deliberately emulated his neighbor. Similar to Ny-anh-nesut's tomb, the chapel of Ptahhotep II also includes, as a part of a sequence of fishing subthemes, the depiction of servants of Ptahhotep II preparing fish for their owner (fig. 22).

One of the most well-known chapels from the Old Kingdom, due to its exquisite decoration and detail, is the chapel of Ptahhotep II, which was first discovered by Auguste Mariette in 1850 and was subsequently documented by Norman de Garis Davies.<sup>158</sup> Ptahhotep II and his family were remarkably successful during the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, with Ptahhotep II's grandfather being the most well known today due to the so-called "Maxims of Ptahhotep". Ptahhotep II and his family were buried in a north Saqqara cemetery, to the west of the Djoser complex, not too far from the burial place of Ny-anh-nesut in the northwest corner of the Sekhemkhet enclosure.<sup>159</sup> The reigns of the family members stretched from the Pharaohs Djedkare-Isesi to Unas, the names of whom, as mentioned previously, appeared in the tomb of Ny-anh-nesut.

Beginning with Ptahhotep I, all the members of the family achieved the status of vizier during their lifetime. Ptahhotep II, the man of interest for this research, did not flaunt his status as vizier, with the only mention of this title coming from an inscription on his coffin. As most viziers surely would have desired their extreme success to be clearly documented in their tomb, it follows that Ptahhotep II was promoted to this position later on in life, possibly after a majority of his decoration and titles had been inscribed. As pointed out by Kanawati, it makes sense that

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<sup>158</sup> Norman De Garis Davies, *The Mastaba of Ptahhetp and Akhetetep at Saqqareh* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1950).

<sup>159</sup> See figure 2.



one would have been promoted to the position of vizier late in life, when the Pharaoh could be sure of the individual's expertise and loyalty.<sup>160</sup> Through his family's wealth and his likely high-ranking before his latest promotion, however, Ptahhotep II would have easily been able to afford the exquisite decoration that lines the walls of his offering chapel. During this time period, because of his family's renown, Ptahhotep II would have been a recognizable figure to the Egyptian people, and the tomb shared with his father, the vizier Akhethotep, would have been a highly frequented tomb, making it possible for another to imitate the decoration, either through hiring the same group of craftsmen or through producing similar scenes that he or she had heard were present in Ptahhotep II's chapel.

Having established Ptahhotep II's chapel and its decoration as a reasonable source of emulation due to his standing and the renown of his iconographic program, it is necessary to investigate whether or not there is any evidence to support the idea that Ny-ankh-nesut emulated his successful neighbor. This would have been possible, as Ptahhotep II lived under the Pharaoh Unas and Ny-ankh-nesut would probably have lived towards the end of Unas' reign or shortly thereafter. Table 1 lists the themes that occur in both tombs. It is clear that both tombs display quite a lot of overlap, as both contain extensive marsh and desert hunting themes and sub-themes.

Beginning with marsh activities, one can continue to find evidence for overlap even in the less common subthemes present in the tombs. As mentioned above, both contain the highly uncommon scene of the preparation and procession of fish offerings for the tomb owner. While this does not explain why Ptahhotep II would have originally included this unpopular scene, if one views Ny-ankh-nesut's inclusion as an act of emulation, it becomes clear why he would have

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<sup>160</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 12.

chosen the scene. It follows that Ny-ankh-nesut believed that, by associating himself with Ptahhotep II, he had overcome the negative consequence of suggesting that fish were a part of his funerary meal. Because Ny-ankh-nesut possibly copied this scene from the tomb of Ptahhotep II, for the purpose of this study, it doesn't matter what the original meaning was to Ptahhotep II. By including it in his own tomb, Ny-ankh-nesut has created a separate meaning for the scene, one that is based on the idea that his own high status will be recognized because of the high status of Ptahhotep II.

Beyond the representation of fish offerings, the two tombs also share the relatively uncommon scene (10.3%) of boatmen fighting, as can be seen in figure 23 from the tomb of Ptahhotep II. According to Bolshakov's study on the meaning behind this scene, it appears as though jousting boatmen did not become popular until the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>161</sup> This means that at the time of the construction of Ptahhotep II's tomb, this sub-theme had not yet become widespread, making it more likely that Ny-ankh-nesut, who followed soon after Ptahhotep II, had followed the lead of his neighbor in his inclusion of the scene. It is also worth mentioning that Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb contains the sub-theme of netting song-birds in an orchard, a scene that is only attested in 11 other tombs at Saqqara.<sup>162</sup> Although it does not occur in the chapel of Ptahhotep, his father Akhethotep does contain this scene and would have been another desirous individual for emulation.

Beyond marsh activity sub-themes, the tombs of Ny-ankh-nesut and Ptahhotep II also share highly uncommon elements and minute details within the category of desert hunting scenes. Not only do both tombs contain the relatively uncommon theme of desert hunting in

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<sup>161</sup> Bolshakov, "Boatmen Jousting," 31-33.

<sup>162</sup> Daoud, "Notes," 29.

general, the subthemes that fall under this category also overlap between the tombs.<sup>163</sup> According to Daoud, Ny-anekh-nesut's tomb contains, as part of a desert-hunting scene, a hunter with a lasso attached to one of the desert hunting animals.<sup>164</sup> Although this style of hunting was rather frequently depicted in the Old Kingdom, as Daoud mentions, only three other tombs contain a lasso attached to one of three overlapped animals grouped in a similar fashion to that of the fragment from Ny-anekh-nesut's tomb; Fetetka, Mereruka, and Ptahhotep II himself, as can be seen in figure 24. According to Leiden University's Mastabase, only 2.4% of Old Kingdom tombs between the reign of Niuserre and Pepi I contained such a detail. Furthermore, Daoud also describes a lion as being a part of the desert hunt, pulling a desert animal over a net barrier.<sup>165</sup> According to the OEE, only 11 other Old Kingdom tombs from Saqqara contain the depiction of a lion, one of which is the chapel of Ptahhotep II (fig. 25).<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, both tombs contain the depictions of hedgehogs, minor animals in desert hunt scenes that occur in 12 tombs from the Saqqara necropolis.<sup>167</sup> Lastly, only 11 tombs from Saqqara contain a depiction of the wavy desert floor that, according to Daoud, occurs in Ny-anekh-nesut's tomb.<sup>168</sup> Once again, this highly uncommon detail also occurs in the chapels of both Ptahhotep II and his father Akhetep (fig. 25).<sup>169</sup> Lastly, in her study on rope making techniques in ancient Egypt, Emily Teeter observed that only five tombs, including Ptahhotep II's and Ny-anekh-nesut's, contain a scene of rope

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<sup>163</sup> For Ny-anekh-nesut's tomb, unfortunately no images of the desert-hunting scene survive. For discussions of the desert hunt fragments in the tomb, see Leahy and Matheison, "The Tomb of Ny-anekh-nesut (Re)Discovered," 35-38, Mahmoud, "Preliminary Report," 81-82, and Daoud, "Notes," 25-26.

<sup>164</sup> Daoud, "Notes," 25

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>166</sup> Davies, *Ptahhetep*, 10-11.

<sup>167</sup> Daoud, "Notes," 26 and Davies, *Ptahhetep*, 10-11.

<sup>168</sup> Daoud, "Notes," 26 and Davies, *Ptahhetep*, 10-11.

<sup>169</sup> Davies, *Ptahhetep*, 10-11.

making as part of a marsh activity.<sup>170</sup> Because of the extreme rarity of these details and the extensive overlap of sub-themes in both tombs, it seems as though Ny-ankh-nesut was either aware of the decoration within Ptahhotep's tomb or, at the very least hired the same group of craftsmen. The minor details of the lasso, the lion, and the wavy desert floor all suggest that the same workshop worked on each tomb. Minor details such as these could have been passed down from the master artists to his apprentices and therefore could have been incorporated into the apprentice's subsequent projects.<sup>171</sup>

Although the tomb of Ptahhotep II does not have as extensive an iconographic program as the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, this does not mean that Ny-ankh-nesut did not emulate Ptahhotep. For instance, Ptahhotep II's tomb does not contain as extensive a representation of agricultural activities, with no depiction of plowing, sowing, or harvesting. However, the lack of complete overlap can merely be attributed to the limited space that Ptahhotep II had to work with in his tomb. Because he did not choose to construct a tomb with his own outer rooms separate from his father's tomb, his entire decorative program can be found in the single room of his chapel. This means that Ptahhotep II had to combine all daily life scenes and offering scenes in a confined space, whereas Ny-ankh-nesut had more room to work with. Ny-ankh-nesut used many similar scenes to Ptahhotep but, because he had multiple additional chambers to decorate, he could not rely solely on Ptahhotep for inspiration. Therefore, their lack of overlap on some scenes is merely due to the excess space that Ny-ankh-nesut had to decorate.

#### ***6.4 The Layout of Ny-ankh-nesut's Tomb: Evidence for Promotion***

In addition to his iconographic program and his apparent emulation of Ptahhotep II, Ny-ankh-nesut also revealed his determination to flaunt his high status in his tomb layout. It is clear

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<sup>170</sup> Teeter, "Ropemaking," 72.

<sup>171</sup> David, *The Ancient Egyptians*, 82-83.

that the tomb is not a typical mastaba in form. Unlike the tombs of Ptahhotep, Mereruka, and Kagemni, Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb consists of "irregular chambers unsymmetrically arranged".<sup>172</sup> The plan is not precisely lined up with the cardinal directions and the chambers. In addition, in order to enter the pillared courtyard, a focal point of other tombs from the time period, one must go out of their way in their journey to the offering chapel. Upon entering room C, a visitor would have had two choices; either walk to the west and enter the pillared room, or to the east to enter the long corridor leading to the chapel. As observed by Mahmoud, the complexity and irregularity of the plan "gives one the impression that the tomb was enlarged from time to time during the course of its construction".<sup>173</sup>

Unlike the tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut, more regularly designed tombs, such as the tombs of Ptahhotep II/Akhethotep (fig. 3) and the vizier Ty (Fig. 4), have a clear path for a visitor to walk, one which has the pillared courtyard in a prominent position. Therefore, it follows that the original layout of the tomb, possibly consisting of an entryway in Room C followed by the corridor leading to the offering chapel, was designed before Ny-ankh-nesut had reached the pinnacle of his career. The multiple stages of construction could also be indicative of why Ny-ankh-nesut was not buried in a more prominent position, as he could have been granted a less favorable position in the cemetery before his final promotion. However, once again, his placement within the necropolis could have been the result of a multitude of factors, none of which can be definitively proven until the area has been further excavated.

While most owners would have built their tomb after reaching the peak of their career, some, such as Ptahhotep II, who only mentioned his position of vizier on his coffin, must have begun building before their political career had come to a close. The pinnacle of Ny-anhh-nesut's

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<sup>172</sup> Mahmoud, "Preliminary Report," 75.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 75.

career probably occurred with his promotion to high priest of Heliopolis. This title occurs in three locations within the tomb; the entryway, the pillared courtyard, and the false door. Both the entryway and the pillared courtyard could have conceivably been constructed after the initial plan for the tomb was designed, especially given that the pillared room seems to be an anomaly in the layout. However, the offering chapel, the bare necessity of a tomb, would certainly have been the first thing to be built. Therefore the presence of this title on the false door would indicate that Ny-anekh-nesut had achieved this rank before the decorative plan of his tomb had commenced or that this title was a later addition to the false door decoration.

Before decoration and inscriptions were to be carved out for the tomb, the rooms had to be excavated and designed. This can clearly be seen from the fact that a large number of tombs were completely abandoned after the death of the tomb owner. Many of these tombs had been carved out but were nonetheless left without any decoration.<sup>174</sup> Before the decoration could be added, the tomb needed to be plastered, an act that could have only happened after the structure had been carved out. Tombs would have also taken a considerable amount of time to construct, with the excavation of the tomb and the plastering of the walls surely taking at least a few years, plenty of time for Ny-anekh-nesut to receive an additional promotion.<sup>175</sup> Therefore, there is reason to believe that it was possible for one to be promoted after his tomb had been cut out but before the decoration had been underway, thus still allowing one to alter their decorative plan after their final promotion.<sup>176</sup> After his promotion to High Priest of Heliopolis and the subsequent wealth and prestige that would certainly have followed such an appointment, Ny-anekh-nesut would have

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<sup>174</sup> Kanawati, *The Tomb and Beyond*, 13.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 10-11. Some tombs took as long as 20 years to construct. While the decoration would have taken a majority of the time, it is safe to assume that carving out the superstructure of the tomb would have also, in general, taking a considerable amount of time.

<sup>176</sup> Strudwick sites the mastaba of Khafkhufu as an example of a tomb whose owner was promoted after construction had begun. Strudwick, *Administration*, 8.

had the means and the authority to expand his tomb to include the pillared courtyard and further equate his tomb with that of Ptahhotep II and other high-ranking officials. It was not enough for Ny-ankh-nesut to record his newly achieved title in his tomb; he was so determined to display his status and wealth that he altered design of his tomb.

### ***6.5 The Status of Ny-ankh-nesut***

This idea of Ny-ankh-nesut altering the design of his tomb to show his high status, taken in conjunction with the iconographic program that Ny-ankh-nesut chose for his tomb and emulation of Ptahhotep the II, seems to be a continuation of Ny-ankh-nesut's attempt to make himself seem as elite as possible and therefore a desirable recipient of offerings from passers-by. While it may have been a reasonable goal for most tomb owners to strive to achieve, it appears as though the main focus of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb is based on achieving this goal and therefore begs the question as to why Ny-ankh-nesut was so concerned with expressing his high status. Would not his inscriptions pertaining to his priesthood and the fact that he was a tomb owner been enough to establish his status?

First of all, it must be emphasized that, although Ny-ankh-nesut had certainly achieved great success during his lifetime, he was never awarded the highest ranking that an elite individual could hope to achieve; that of vizier. Through the wealth that he had accrued during his lifetime as a member of the royal court and as a high priest, he certainly would have had the means to produce a beautifully decorated multi-room mastaba. However, due to the fact that he was not as successful as some of his contemporaries, it follows that he would have wished to emphasize his wealth through his tomb decoration in order to, to some extent, equate himself with the viziers buried at Saqqara.

Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 2, the middle to late 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty time period saw an increased emphasis on magical food offerings, as evidenced by the lengthened offering lists and the abundance of offering table scenes on the western wall of cult chapels. This emphasis probably grew out of the fact that tomb owners began to realize the unreliability of real food offerings to provide sustenance for eternity, a development that Ny-ankh-nesut would have been well aware of. Real food offerings relied on descendants to provide the food, many of whom surely would have lost interest over generations. However, as can be seen from the continued use of funerary estates and the continual request of offerings from the living, real food offerings were still the preferred mode of sustenance. Therefore, because of the dying out of real food offerings that took place during Ny-ankh-nesut's lifetime, Ny-ankh-nesut and his contemporary tomb builders had to go to great lengths to ensure that, every once in a while, a visitor would leave offerings within their tomb. Ny-ankh-nesut seemingly chose to ensure this by displaying how successful of an individual he was during his lifetime.

The location of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb could have also prompted the owner to express his status. Based on preliminary excavations of the area, a number of other tomb elements, such as false doors, have been found in close proximity to Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb.<sup>177</sup> As stated above, Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb also lies in relative proximity to the groupings of tombs around Ptahhotep II. Based on the immediate surroundings and the relative closeness of Unas and Ptahhotep II, it follows that Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb would have been located amidst other Old Kingdom tombs, possibly the start of another section of burials within Saqqara. It is impossible to determine at this point in time which other individuals were buried around him, but it is plausible that Ny-

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<sup>177</sup> Mahmoud, "Preliminary Report," 87.



ankh-nesut would have been surrounded by his family or others associated with the cult of Re at Heliopolis.<sup>178</sup>

However, based on the excavated area of Saqqara, it is clear that a majority of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty tombs at Saqqara were not located around Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb, with most of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty tombs located around the complexes of Unas – to the east of the Pharaoh - and Teti respectively, as can be seen in figure 2.<sup>179</sup> Thus, Ny-ankh-nesut does not seem to have been granted a commanding position in his funerary complex.

Most of the tombs of high-ranking officials dating from the reign of Unas were located to the east of Unas along the Pharaoh's causeway.<sup>180</sup> One did not necessarily need to be a vizier to be buried close to a pharaoh at Saqqara. Officials with the titles 'Overseers of Granaries' and 'Overseers of Treasuries' both clustered around the 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty tombs of Teti and Unas.<sup>181</sup> Clearly, the high priest of Heliopolis and a royal attendant, positions which were frequently also held by viziers, would have established Ny-ankh-nesut as a worthy candidate for an esteemed location within the necropolis. Stating overcrowding as the reason for burial at a distance from the Pharaoh does not satisfactorily answer the question; as stated above, seemingly lesser-ranked officials contemporary to Ny-ankh-nesut were buried in close proximity to the Pharaoh. If overcrowding was a problem, why would 'Overseer of Granaries' been granted prized but limited locations within the necropolis? Therefore, it was probably not Ny-ankh-nesut's ranking within the Egyptian hierarchy that inhibited his ability to be buried along the causeway of Unas,

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<sup>178</sup> It is common for individuals to be buried with their family members. Not only was it common for family members to share tombs, such as Ptahhotep II and Akhethoteph, but it was also common to be buried close to other tombs of individual family members. See Kanawati, 2001: 10.

<sup>179</sup> A.J. Spencer, "Saqqara: Private Tombs of the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Dynasties," in *LA Volume V*, ed. W. Helck and E. Otto (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1984): 403.

<sup>180</sup> Roth, "Organization of Royal Cemeteries," 202.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 204-205.

but some other factor, such as a personal connection with the area in which he was buried or the fact that he was given a plot of land within the necropolis prior to his latest promotion.

Even though the details behind the organization of the necropoleis at Saqqara are not known, it still would have been an honor to be buried close to the Pharaoh. Because the King had the power to allot land to his bureaucratic workers, it follows that he would have only desired his family members, members of his royal court, and other intimates to be buried close to him and remain with him in his afterlife. Even if Ny-ankh-nesut had requested this specific plot of land, possibly to be buried close to his family, he still would have had to convince visitors of his wealth and high-status in spite of his burial at a distance from the tombs of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty Pharaohs and the majority of tombs of his contemporaries.

Thus, Ny-ankh-nesut, in trying to convince visitors to leave offerings, had to confront his inability to obtain the highest rank in Egyptian society, the lack of real food offerings that were distributed during his time period, and the location of his tomb at a distance from that of the Pharaohs. Because of these factors, it makes sense that Ny-ankh-nesut would have felt the need to continually remind visitors that he was a highly successful individual, one more than worthy of offerings. Although the end of the Old Kingdom marked a time in which an increasing emphasis was placed on magical offerings, actual food offerings would have still remained the preferred mode of sustenance for the deceased. By including in his tomb the addition of the pillared courtyard, a mark of esteem, and the impressive sculptural program and their scene content, Ny-ankh-nesut did everything in his power as a tomb owner to promote real food offerings in his tomb from visitors.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Looting has been an impediment to the study of Egyptian culture, causing many ancient Egyptian artifacts to be irreparably damaged, lost, or removed from their original context and often scattered in collections throughout the world. Without being able to view the tomb in its original context, it is impossible to investigate a tomb's entire decorative program and to analyze how a specific iconographic scene interacted with other scenes that surrounded it.

The tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut is a good example of this problem; the tomb has suffered greatly from looting, with more than 60 fragments distributed throughout the world in private and museum collections. While it is possible, in viewing the offering bearer scene belonging to the Allen Memorial Art Museum, to determine that Ny-ankh-nesut was concerned with providing sustenance for his *ka* in the afterlife, this fragment in isolation does not encapsulate the ways in which Ny-ankh-nesut might have tailored his iconographic program for his own purpose and what aspects of his journey to the afterlife he was particularly concerned about.

This paper has shown that, with the re-discovery of the tomb in 2000, its partial excavation, and ongoing documentation, research regarding the re-contextualization of the tomb's fragments can produce meaningful results. Since the majority of our knowledge about Old Kingdom has been gathered through the study of its funerary structures, a tomb as large as Ny-ankh-nesut's that contains such a rich selection of iconographic material is worthy of detailed examination.

This study suggested original locations for the fragments within the tomb based on similar scene content with other *in situ* fragments as well as on the generally accepted meaning and purpose behind these various themes. *Comparanda* from other well-documented tombs were also employed to determine plausible original contexts for the looted fragments. Orientation on

the walls of the tomb was determined through logical suppositions based on the movement of action in the fragments and data from a group of tombs documented in Leiden University's *Mastabase*.

After reconstructing the original plan of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb, an in depth analysis of the iconographic program found in the tomb was undertaken. In addition to examining the tomb in the context of the well-known requirement that the tomb was meant to provide an eternal home for the tomb owner's *ka*, this paper also used the concept of agency and the social context behind tomb construction to determine and explain Ny-ankh-nesut's intent and personal preference for choosing his specific decorative program.

Through his use of specific scenes, such as offering bearers in procession and cattle butchering, Ny-ankh-nesut, along with nearly all of his contemporary tomb builders, satisfied the all-important task of providing magical sustenance for his *ka* in the afterlife. However, in comparison to other tombs of the period, it can be seen that his use of more rarely depicted scenes, such as boatmen fighting, agricultural scenes, and desert hunts, all of which highlight his status in Egyptian society, are proof that Ny-ankh-nesut had an unusual iconographic program. Through a comparison of some highly rare details, such as the use of rope lassoes, depiction of specific song-birds, and fish offerings seen only in the tombs of Ny-ankh-nesut and Ptahhotep II (a near contemporary noble who was a higher ranking vizier), it seems reasonable to suggest that Ny-ankh-nesut consciously emulated iconographic elements from the tomb of his grander neighbor, either by hiring the same artistic workshop or through his directed design of his tomb's decoration. The emulation of a vizier's tomb would have served to reinforce Ny-ankh-nesut's status in the eyes of those who viewed his tomb. There has been little scholarship on the concept of emulation in tomb construction in the Old Kingdom. This study's comparison of Ny-ankh-

nesut's tomb with that of Ptahhotep II provides some intriguing prospects for future study. Furthermore, the accretive plan for Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb suggests that it was built up over time, as his rank elevated, in order to rival the multi-room tombs that were being built by his contemporaries at Saqqara. Ny-ankh-nesut, in both the plan and decoration of his tomb, was concerned with expressing his high status in Egyptian society.

While this paper has demonstrated some ways in which Ny-ankh-nesut could have employed the concept of agency in tomb construction, significant areas for future study remain. There must be a detailed first-hand investigation into the tomb and the surrounding area. In order to correctly restore the various known fragments to their original location within the tomb, detailed measurements of their size and of the wall space within the tomb must be undertaken. Analysis of the minor details seen in the fragments still located in the tomb today must be undertaken and compared to the looted fragments to reaffirm the grouping of scenes together based on similar content. If, through such an analysis, it could be determined that the same artist performed the carving on each fragment, the legitimacy of the grouping would only be increased.

This same concept could, in future research, be applied to the tomb of Ptahhotep II to determine whether or not Ny-ankh-nesut hired the same workshop as Ptahhotep II. Because many of the minor details that occur in both of these tombs are only recorded in print rather than in photography, it is impossible to definitively determine whether or not the same artist's hand worked in both tombs. Sections of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb still remain unexcavated and/or poorly examined. Before the present study can advance further, excavation and recording of Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb should be completed.

Finally, it is imperative that the area surrounding Ny-ankh-nesut's tomb, to the northwest of the Sekhemkhet enclosure, be thoroughly resurveyed. Through the excavations of Ny-ankh-

nesut's tomb and a poorly published geophysical survey covering the area surrounding the tomb, it is clear that other unexcavated tombs are located around the area. Ny-ankh-nesut's high status could be indicative of the fact that the area to the Northwest of the Sekhemkhet enclosure represented a new development in the necropolis and further excavation of the area and the status of the tomb owners buried there could help display this development. This area will aid in the understanding of Egyptian funerary practices and of Old Kingdom Egyptian society in general.

### Appendix 1: Figures

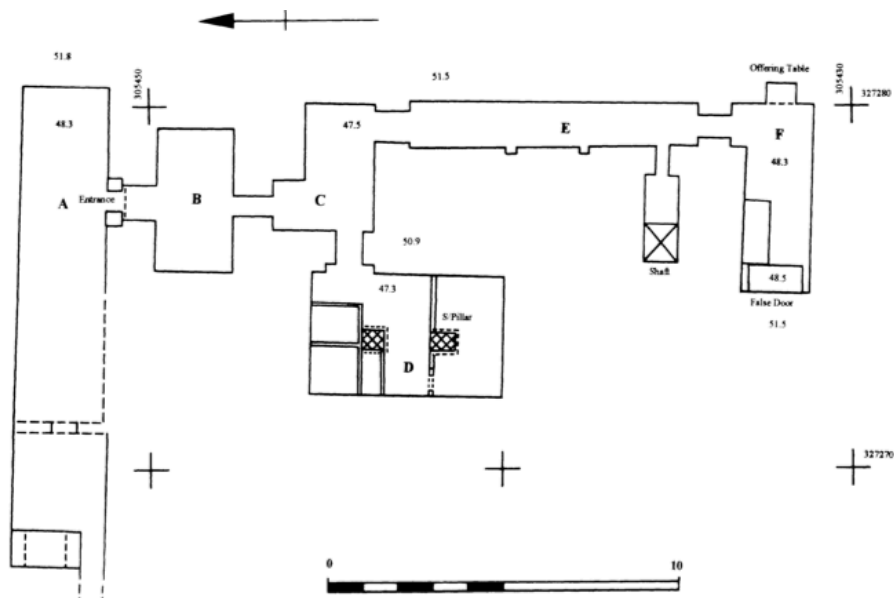


Fig. 1. Layout of the Tomb of Ny-ankh-nesut

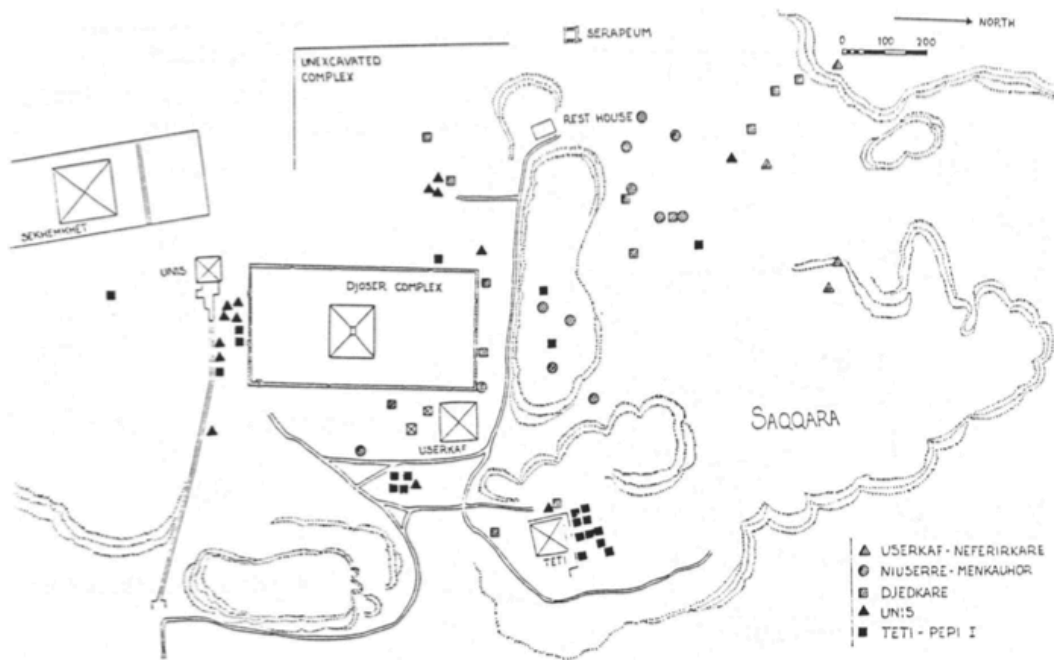


Fig. 2. Distribution of Elite Tombs at Saqqara

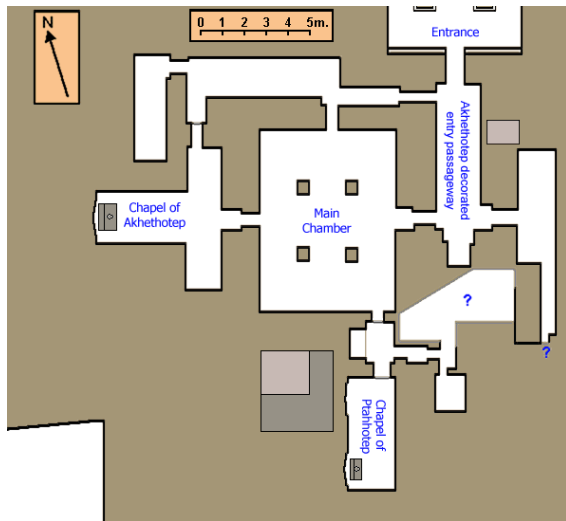


Fig. 3. The Layout of the Tomb of Ptahhotep II/Akhethotep

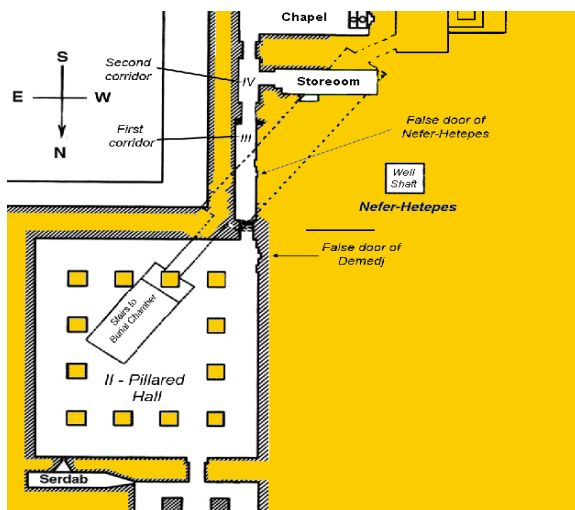


Fig. 4. The Layout of the Tomb of Ty



Fig. 5. Allen Memorial Art Museum





Fig. 6. Meijer Collection



Fig. 7. Los Angeles County Museum of Art 47.8.3



Fig. 8. Cleveland Museum of Art 1930.735



Fig. 9. Honolulu Museum of Art 2896



Fig. 10. Worcester Art Museum 1931.99



Fig. 11. Cleveland Museum of Art 1930.737





Fig. 12. Cleveland Museum of Art 1930.738



Fig. 13. Fogg Art Museum 1934.17



Fig. 14. Cleveland Museum of Art 1930.734



Fig. 15. Dallas Museum of Art 1965. 28.M

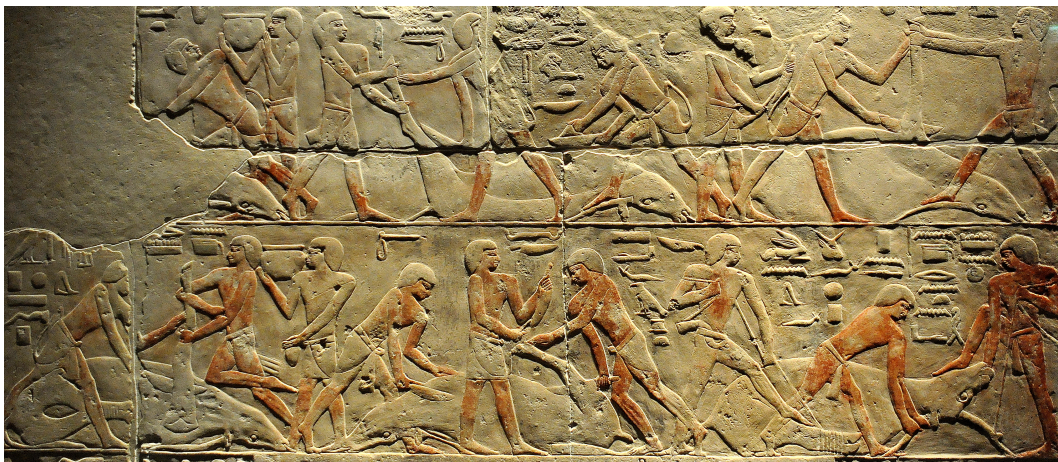


Fig. 16. Staaliche Sammlung Agyptischer Kunst AS 5970



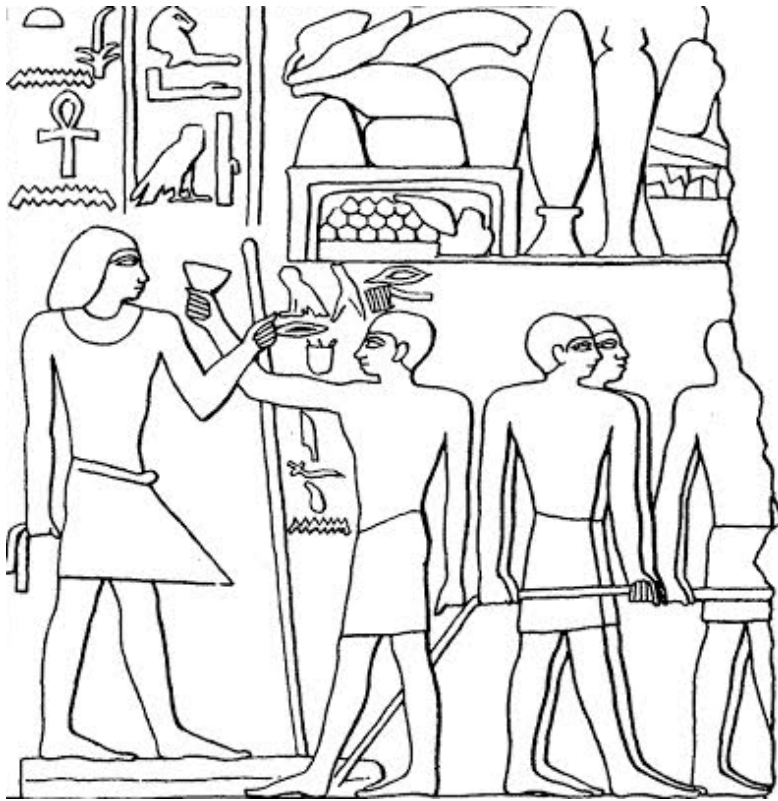


Fig. 17. Royal Scottish Museum 1958.46



Fig. 18. Cleveland Museum of Art 1930.736



Fig. 19. Nelson Atkins Museum of Art 30-14



Fig. 20. Detroit Institute of Arts 30.371



Fig. 21. Cincinnati Museum of Art 1971.28





Fig. 22. Preparation of fish from the tomb of Ptahhotep II



Fig. 23. Boatmen fighting scene from the tomb of Ptahhotep II



Fig. 24. Use of lasso in a desert hunt detail from the tomb of Ptahhotep II

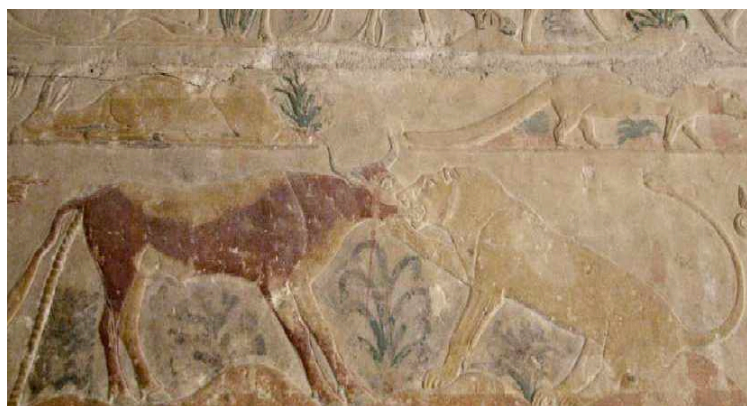


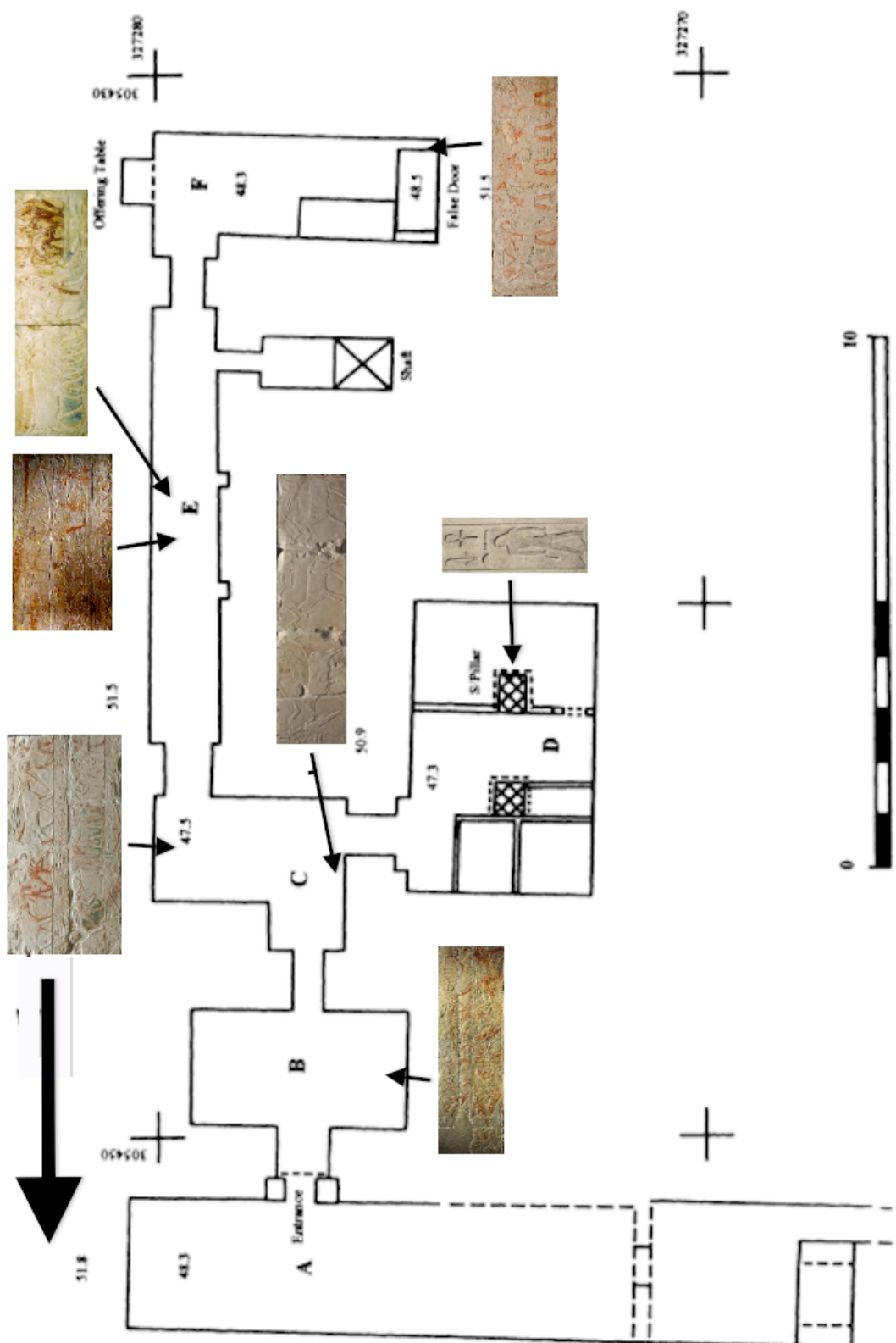
Fig. 25. Lion and wavy desert floor detail from the tomb of Ptahhotep II



**Appendix 2: Tombs From Niuserre to end of Pepi I (259 tombs in the Mastabase)**

<b>Sub-Theme</b>	<b>Percent Occurrence</b>	<b>Percent Orientation (E-N-S-W)</b>	<b>Contained in Ptahhotep II's Tomb</b>
Flax Harvest (Fig. 18)	11.0 %	50% - 8.8% - 17.6% - 8.8%	No
Grain Harvest (Fig. 18)	16.9 %	50% - 9.3% - 16.7% - 14.8%	No
Plowing (Fig. 18)	10.7%	48.7% - 12.8% - 15.4% - 12.8%	No
Fowling with Throwstick (Fig. 10)	12.5 %	30% - 17.5% - 12.5% - 10%	No
Fighting Boatmen (Fig. 19)	10.3 %	44.1% - 11.8% - 11.8% - 8.8%	Yes
Cattle Crossing (Fig. 19)	12.9 %	26.2% - 40.5% - 7.1% - 11.9%	Yes
Fishing with Dragnet (Fig. 19)	17.6 %	46.7% - 23.3% - 10% - 11.7%	No
Dragging Statue of Deceased (Fig. 17)	8.5 %	24.5% - 22.6% - 26.4% - 20.8%	No
Papyrus Harvesting (Fig. 19)	8.1%	50% - 13.3% - 13.3% - 6.7%	Yes
Papyrus Boat Making (Fig. 19)	10.7 %	37.5% - 20.8% - 12.5% - 16.7%	Yes
Fish Offerings (Fig. 19)	3.3 %	7.7% - 30.7% - 15.4% - 30.7%	Yes
Milking Domestic Cattle (Fig. 19)	12.9 %	23.0% - 36.9% - 10.3% - 20.5%	No
Desert Hunt Scene ( <i>In situ</i> )	5.1 %	15.6% - 11.1% - 11.1% - 55.6%	Yes
Offering Bearers with ka Servants (Figs. 5, 12, 15)	73.3 %	17.7% - 20.9% - 19.1% - 34.5%	Yes
Procession of Desert Cattle (Fig. 14)	32.0 %	25.6% - 16.3% - 25.6% - 27.6%	Yes
Procession of Domestic Cattle (Figs. 12 and 13)	42.0%	28.3% - 21.5% - 20.6% - 25.5%	Yes
Slaughtering of Cattle (Fig. 16)	46.3 %	26.5% - 18.7% - 20.8% - 26.5%	Yes
Hunting with lasso (in situ)	2.4 %	25.0% - 12.5% - 12.5% - 50%	Yes

# Appendix Three: Placement of Looted Fragments



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